THE APPRECIATION OF THE DRAMA

CHARLES H. CAFFIN

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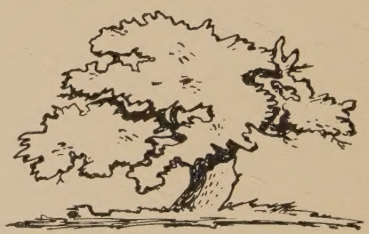

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THE APPRECIATION OF THE DRAMA

INTERIOR OF THE RED BULL THEATER; ONE OF THE FEW THAT SURVIVED TO THE RESTORATION.
Visited by Pepys, March 23, 1661.

THE APPRECIATION OF THE DRAMA

BY

CHARLES H. CAFFIN

Author of "How to Study Pictures," "A Child's Guide to Pictures," etc.

NEW YORK

THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY

1908

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TO FELLOW PLAYGOERS

WITH you in mind I have written this book, in token of the love we have in common for the theater. Whether we know it from behind the Curtain or solely from the Front, we love it for the spell that it wove about our wonder as children and around our hearts and understanding in later years, and that to the last shall haunt our imagination. We love it alike for the laughter and the tears that it has wrung from us; as well for drowning of care as for stimulus to thought; scarcely less for its parodies on men and things than for its enrichment of our knowledge of and zest in life, for the broadening of our sympathy with all sorts and conditions of humanity. Aye, we love it, when it transports us to the heights of spiritual imagination, or tips us on the see-saw of folly, or draws us down through dark places of sin and sorrow. That it is but a scene of painted illusion, trod by shadows of the real, we know, and for that reason believe in it the more.

For we see therein a microcosm of the drama of our own lives, as we make our entrances and exits, fuming and strutting for a brief appearance, loving, laboring, suffering, fooling, and rejoicing, on the impalpable stage of Eternity, whose drop-cloths are the mystery of the Universe.

To help us to find a still firmer basis of conviction for this love of ours is the unpretending purpose of

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	The Audience	1
II	The Stage — Plastic	23
III	The Stage — Pictorial	48
IV	The Actor	69
V	The Play	100
VI	The Material of the Drama	121
VII	Genesis of a Plot	154
VIII	The Introduction	179
IX	The Development	213
X	Climax — Denouement — Catastrophe	231
XI	The Motive of the Plot	238
XII	The American Outlook	273

ILLUSTRATIONS

Interior of the Red Bull Theater . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

Greek Theater 24

Roman Theater 32

An Early English Mystery Play . . . 48

Mystery Performance in the Fifteenth Century 68

Mystery Stage in the Sixteenth Century . 100

Old Inn Showing Courtyard for Plays . 122

Interior of the Swan Theater 154

The Olympian Theater at Vicenza . . 180

Italian Comedy Scene of the Sixteenth Century 212

Italian Tragedy Scene of the Sixteenth Century 232

Scene from Corneille's "Andromeda" . 270

THE APPRECIATION OF THE DRAMA

The Appreciation of the Drama

CHAPTER I

THE AUDIENCE

THE point of view of this book is from a comfortable seat in front of the curtain. We may study the drama in a library chair, regarding it as a branch of literature. But not on the present occasion. We have settled ourselves in our chairs and await the rise of the curtain. We propose to confine our attention to what is visible from the front and to any reflections aroused thereby. These may suggest comparisons between the past and the present; for we have assumed the role of a playgoer whose experiences date back indefinitely, but whose appreciation, it is to be hoped, has not been staled by repetition, much less limited to any set style. We are to have long memories but open minds.

Meanwhile, there is a delay. The curtain is due to rise, but the orchestra has started again

its opening selection. The reason may be the indifference of the "star" to everything except her own convenience or whim. We could name names, but won't. More often it is the manager's almost necessary concession to late comers. He would save, as far as possible, the feelings of his punctual patrons. But, even so, there will be a rude residuum of the audience to whom the feelings of others are a matter of absolutely no concern. These elegant barbarians will come trailing through the first act; groping in the darkness, stumbling over other people's toes, blocking out the view of the stage, disturbing the continuity of the dialogue, and generally without a word of apology to their victims, as if they had a special permit to be ill-mannered.

The delay, however, gives us an interval for reflection. I propose that we turn the spotlight on ourselves. We, of the audience, what are we? Why are we here? With what sort of minds and purposes have we paid our money?

For the time being, if you come to think of it, we have taken off not only our wraps, but something of our individuality. We have merged our separate identities into that curi-

ously conglomerate thing, a mob, a crowd, an audience; and, as always in this mundane scheme of things, in losing one thing we have gained something else.

Students of the psychology of crowds have noted, though they cannot explain, certain phenomena. A crowd can be swayed in this or that direction by the word of one. It will reach an extreme of feeling of which the individuals composing it, would probably be incapable. At first, the feeling may be one of vague apprehension. Here and there this takes clearer shape, colored by the idiosyncrasy of individuals; it grows by contagion: the air becomes impregnated with it; it catches up into its circle of influence those who hitherto had held aloof; and gradually the consciousness of the whole body becomes affected; at first to be possessed with a diversity of impressions, which, however, it by degrees assimilates, until at last a fixed idea has taken possession of the crowd or audience. The result may be a lynching, or the unanimous acceptance or condemnation of a new play.

Compare this with the reading of a play by oneself in the library. Here one has a fixed idea at the start — one's own individual bundle of

experiences, preferences, and prejudices. As one reads, each character, incident, and speech is subjected to the test of this. We are not surrounded by an atmosphere of hushed expectancy or rapt attention. Our attention is not diverted by a laugh here and there, a sob elsewhere, a spontaneous burst of applause from somewhere else. There is no repeated suggestion from others that there may be more in the play than what we find in it; nothing of the reinforcement of our own judgment that comes from finding it shared by others. We never lose hold of ourselves; all the time we are individual readers in presence of an individual author, judging him solely by the application of his writing to our own specific experience and taste; apt to be unduly pleased by what exactly fits our own case, doubtful, or even resentful, of what doesn't.

Lastly, we weigh the pros and cons of our appreciation primarily and almost exclusively by the appeal which the play makes to our minds. We may persuade ourselves that we realize the characters and visualize the incidents, but even so, the impressions formed are solely mental ones. We do not really see with our

eyes the people and the incidents. Yet the very essence of a drama is that it is unfolded to our actual sight, that it is a visible representation of character and incident. Even more, it is a representation that appeals to our sense of hearing. There is probably not one reader in a thousand — no one, I will venture to say, who has not trained his own voice and made a study of the effects of vocal sounds — that can form a mental conception of how the drama will affect the mind when the speeches reach it audibly, colored as they will be by the vocal qualities, peculiar to each character and affected by the various incidents.

Indeed, it is only when the impression of the drama reaches us through the avenues of sight and sound, that we can fully realize its import. On the other hand, if the mental impression that the words convey is not heightened, when the action is represented to eye and ear, then the play may be one of absorbing interest, but it is for the library, not the theater. It is a literary masterpiece, maybe; but not a stage-drama. Indeed, the very word drama, bodily preserved since the days of the Athenian theater, implies this. It is derived from a verb, mean-

ing "to do"; and the drama is the deed shown in the doing, — the portrayal of the action. A play was different from a poem or narrative, because it represented in visible shape the doing of the deed involved. In the most primitive form known to students — as, for example, among the bushmen of Australia, where some of the actors represent animals while others hunt them — the drama is purely one of representing the doing of the action. But the civilized development, even in its rudimentary form, included the accompaniment of voice. The action was further illuminated by descriptive speeches or actual dialogue.

So that, as we conceive of drama now, sight and sound are essential to its proper appreciation. The sight of the characters and incidents must add vividness to our appreciation of the mental impression; the sound of the voices, as illustrative of character, and affected by the situations in which the personages find themselves, must add color to the impression. I repeat, it is because an author has not felt the need of or made provision for these essential accompaniments to the merely mental suggestion of the dialogues, that some plays of great

literary excellence are not acceptable as stage dramas. To discover the value and character of these sight and sound accompaniments is one of the objects of this book.

Ludwig, the mad king of Bavaria, indulged in the luxury of a theater of his own, in which companies performed with him as sole audience. The mental impression reached him, reinforced by sight and sound. But think of the empty hush of that theater occupied by only one man. That one sat alone, in the darkened auditorium, absorbing into his single self the visible, audible, and mental impressions that were meant to be shared by a crowd. Was it the strain of this upon one human brain that helped to drive him mad, or the madness already in him that with abnormal effrontery dared to experience these multiple sensations in his single self?

For it is this multiplication of sensations, as we have already hinted, that takes place in an audience. One may compare it to the discharge of a gun in a natural auditorium among the mountains. There is first the single pop of sound — corresponding to the single impression that a reader receives in the solitude of his

library from the words he is reading and the idea contained in them. But among the mountains the single sound is echoed here and echoed there, and the echoes themselves are caught up and flung back from other heights, until the whole mountain auditorium reverberates, and the single note has grown into a thunderous roar.

In a theater audience there is some such corresponding multiplication of sensations. The necessary thing to arouse it is some gunshot in the drama, that will awaken echoes in a diversity of minds. The audience itself will do the rest; probably cannot help doing it. That it involves these gunshots is another cause of a drama being a good acting play; while the absence of them relegates other dramas to the library alone. To try to discover the nature of these gunshots is another of the objects of this book.

Already we may be sure that they do not depend upon any one quality, or upon the appeal to a few minds alone. They must address themselves to the minds of many; indeed, it may almost be said that they must be capable of appealing to the individual minds of every

one in the audience, just as each projection on the mountain sides is reached by the echoes of that gun discharge.

This seems to imply that a good acting play must have the elements of popularity. But the use of this word is apt to convey a suggestion of inferiority, of something whose standard is lowered to suit the popular taste. And certainly the popular taste does frequently incline toward what is worthless, whether judged as a representation of life or from the point of view of art. Yet a few nights later one of these same popular audiences will be applauding Shakespeare. There is no getting away from the fact, that the latter, while he appeals to minds of the finest culture, is popular with every class of people, except those few who are given over entirely to levity. I don't know what manager was responsible for the statement, so often repeated, that "Shakespeare spells ruin." If the words mean anything, they must refer to the unwisdom of spending large sums on a single production. If, however, they involve the insinuation that a manager cannot live by producing Shakespeare, the falsehood is demonstrated by the experience of a con-

siderable number, both in this country and in England. Especially in the industrial centers, where men and women know the rigor of life in its most stringent form, Shakespeare is popular.

On the other hand, it would be true to say that Ibsen is not popular. While his plays are steadily winning increased approval from thoughtful people, they are still *caviare* to general audiences; and perhaps always will be. Yet even as I write this, I recall a recent performance of *The Master Builder*, given by the Russian actress Madame Komisarzhevsky and her company. The audience, composed mainly of Russians and Yiddish Jews, seemed mixed enough; but its interest was unquestionably hearty, and apparently aroused as much by the play as by the actors. Yet we must admit that among mixed audiences of English-speaking people, Ibsen is not popular. Whether this is the result of some inherent defect in his plays, as compared, for example, with those of Shakespeare, we will inquire later. Meanwhile one reason of his want of popularity is clear enough. He invites his audiences to think. If they will not or cannot, they are bored.

This raises the question as to why people go

to the theater. The fundamental reason, I suppose, is the gregarious tendency of human nature. Men and women, tiring of themselves and hungry for the companionship of their kind, flock to summer resorts, churches, hotels, concert rooms, theaters, even into the streets. It is this tendency that helped to change the nomad life into that of village communities; that, in our own day, has had its share in drawing people from the country to cities, where the flocking opportunities are greatest and most accessible. But the wear and tear of these gregarious conditions produces a reaction. There is a yearly increase, for example, in the number of persons who, being in a position to decide how they will spend their summers, select a quiet spot where the reverse of these conditions prevails. They wish to get away by themselves. How frequently, too, one hears some one remark that he or she is tired of theaters; that a quiet reading of a play at home is preferable. They may go on to explain that, the older they grow, the more they are inclined to choose their own forms of entertainment, and the less disposed to accept those which are served up by others whose business it is to

cater for the largest number. Their taste has become too exacting, or, at least, too individual, to submit to the contagion of the general taste. They have, in fact, lost the willingness to surrender a portion of themselves to the aggregate of a crowd or audience.

But we were speaking of people who do go to theaters. I suppose if you were to canvas a number of these as to why they go, a frequent answer would be — "Because I wish to be amused." Some would put it more strongly — "Because I wish to get away from the ennui of life or the worries of business." They will very likely add — "I have so much thinking to do in business that, when I go to the theater, I don't wish to be asked to think. I simply hope to be amused." One lady was overheard to remark at a performance of *The Master Builder*, in which Hilda appears throughout the piece in a simple costume — "I don't care for Ibsen; I love a play like *The Thief*, where the leading lady wears three different beautiful gowns." Apparently this lady's reason for going to the theater was partly the same that draws her to a department store — to see the latest models from Paris. And a similar love of pretty dresses,

attached to a pretty face, attracts the business man who only wishes to be amused.

Many replies, on the other hand, would admit that the "star" performer was the chief motive for visiting the theater. The play itself was of secondary consideration.

So far, the answers that have come in rather seem to justify those persons who prefer to choose their own form of entertainment. Why should they identify themselves with a crowd that is seeking only to be amused, or swell the triumph of a popular but possibly indifferent "star"?

A very large portion, however, of the average audience has yet to be heard from. It is that contingent of younger theater-goers who still have the enthusiasms of youth, who look to the stage for a picture of life, especially the adventurous and sentimental aspects of it. They, too, hope to be amused, but their motive also includes a higher need of entertainment. They are not satisfied with a mere tickling of their senses; they wish to receive through their senses a stimulus to their minds — an enlargement of experience, a broader vision of the possibilities of life.

Lastly, there is that necessarily smaller portion of the audience, which desires a form of entertainment that with less reliance on the sensibilities appeals more directly to the mind. They, in their turn, are not satisfied with the crude and elementary manifestations of emotion; they wish to view them in relation to the real problems of life. They demand that the play shall have some sort of ethical significance.

In this respect they are at one with the person who finds his own entertainment in the seclusion of his library. But they differ from him, because they are not satisfied with a purely mental impression; they wish the latter to be reinforced and enriched with the impressions of sight and sound.

The result, then, of the voting seems to have established four reasons why people go to theaters. Throwing to one side a few straggling replies — to wit — "I go because it is the correct thing; because I wish to show off my fine clothes; or because, like Pepys, I have to take my wife, 'she, poor fool, having nothing better to do'"; neglecting these and sundry other separate ones, we divide the remaining votes into four heaps. The first, a big one

proves that a considerable part of audiences is satisfied to have its senses stimulated with what is pleasant to ear and eye. It is partial to shows and spectacles. The second demand humor with or without spectacular accompaniment. The third, which is probably as large as the two previous ones added together, is fond of the spectacular and humorous, but first and foremost expects to have its feelings and emotions aroused. While the fourth, comparatively a small one, is not satisfied unless the emotions in which they are asked to share are exhibited in their moral or ethical relation to the actual conditions of life and society.

Now since the drama is to-day, as it always has been, a democratic institution, depending on the will of the people, plays will be produced which will satisfy each of these four kinds of theater-goers. Therefore, while the object of this book is to raise the standard of taste and stimulate an appreciation of the highest, it would be foolish to contend that only the latter is worthy of support. For my own part, I am rather inclined to the belief that a genuine play-lover should be able to enjoy each and all of these four kinds of play, and, if

he is to be a real student of the drama, will recognize its necessary many-sidedness and be slow to reject any one phase as irrelevant or unimportant. Nor does this imply an easy and uncritical acceptance of everything produced upon the stage. He will still demand of each play that it shall be up to the best standard permitted to its own class.

To admit the desirableness of such open-mindedness is to recognize, that it is well with us if our own natures are correspondingly composite in character; that our senses, as well as our minds, are or should be a respectable possession, fit to be acknowledged and catered for; that we have feelings as well as intellectuality, and are to be congratulated, if, while we grow old, we can still possess some of the joy in foolishness that distinguished our youth. On the other hand, to those of my readers who are still in the latter happy period, I would suggest that, if the maturer, serious form of the drama fails to attract them, that is not to be wondered at. Appreciation is a product of growth in life and personal development, and just as the drama itself in all ages has kept pace with the development of the people, so our appreciation

of it corresponds to our own individual growth. Some people, it is true, may never progress beyond the child-stage of wishing to be amused; or the adolescent period of sentiment; but the majority, I believe, have at least the capacity to develop into that condition of maturity in which sentiment and emotion are no longer viewed in a purely personal way, but in their relation to the ethical and moral.

But the preferences of audiences are not the only point to be considered. There is another — their responsibility. How far are we who compose the audiences responsible for the quality of the plays produced? It is customary to speak as if the responsibility rested solely on the managers, and there was nothing left to audiences but to take what is offered them.

The usual reason given for such an attitude is the fact, that in America the control of the theaters and of the plays produced and of the actors who take part in them is practically centered in the hands of one group of individuals, who for purposes of business have merged their several identities in a common policy. Thus there is an end of competition, and of the free interplay of supply and demand. This

is the first charge and the second follows hard upon it. Since the policy of the syndicate is necessarily a business one, it is assumed to be nothing else. It is merely commercial. But on the face of them these two charges seem to contradict each other. If the policy does not result in supplying what is demanded, it will not be commercially successful; or, inversely, the fact that audiences are willing to pay their money seems to show that they are getting what they want; that, in fact, their demand is being supplied. The only way of avoiding this contradiction is to assume, that it is not because audiences want these plays that they pay their money and make them commercially successful, but because they cannot do without plays and those are the only ones available. Well, for my own part, I will not grant this; nor will I admit that, if the policy of the syndicate is merely commercial, the fact exonerates the audiences. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that audiences, considered in mass, want what they get and get what they want; and that the commercialism that we deplore is not foisted upon us by a callous syndicate but is inherent in ourselves.

For what is our standard of appreciation? How do we judge the merit of a novel or a play? Is it not, in nine cases out of ten, by the number of copies sold in one case, and in the other by the number of people that are attracted to the theater? The one is a "best seller"; the other a "big attraction," and, in each case, impressed by the number of dollars that have been amassed, we hasten to add our own. We are not, as a community, given over entirely to the pursuit of the dollar; but the dollar is the standard by which we are far too prone to estimate the value of men and things. The result is an appalling amount of vulgarity of taste, or, at best, an amazing levity that habitually refuses to regard anything but money seriously. It is, of course, not due to lack of intelligence, but to the fact that we are not accustomed to refer to our intelligence as a guide of taste. We follow the crowd, and the crowd is commercial to the core.

If this is so, it is the veriest hypocrisy to lay the blame for the present commercialism of our stage upon a handful of men, who are a product of the community, and in a sense its servants. For after all they are compelled by their own purpose of making money to give the

community what the majority of it seems to want. Nor within these limitations can they be accused of parsimony. They search at home and abroad for the kind of plays that audiences have endorsed or that it seems likely they will endorse, and, when found, produce them without stint of money. Often, it is true, without much taste or intelligence; but these are requisites to which they have good reason to believe the majority of their audiences are indifferent. In that which does interest the latter — the money question — they are reasonably lavish.

Nor are the efforts made by certain independent managers to appeal to the taste and intelligence of audiences crowned with sufficient reward to tempt the syndicate to follow their example. If the response were hearty and widespread, we should be justified in complaining if the syndicate failed to cater to it. As it is, honesty should compel us to admit that they would be fools if they did.

But the tone of this book is not to be one of pessimism. On the contrary, it has its origin in the belief that the condition of the drama in America is improving steadily, if slowly, because there is a growing number among audiences

whose appreciation is founded upon good taste and intelligence. And its purpose is to try and increase the pace and volume of improvement by stimulating in the minds of a greater number this sort of appreciation. Therefore we have made the subject of the first chapter the audience itself; believing that upon it in the final analysis depends the conditions as well as the appreciation of the drama in our own day.

For, whether we think of audiences as the mine from which the dramatist digs his metal, or as the tribunal to which his finished work appeals, the more we realize that we ourselves are mainly responsible for the condition of the drama in our own times. Indeed, I cannot see how any practical improvement in the appreciation of the drama can be reached, except through this clear understanding at the start: that it is a product of what we, the audiences, may happen to be. In primitive times, the actors and the poet or dramatist actually stepped out from the ring of the audience, to entertain their fellows. They were, for the time being, the mouthpieces and enactors of ideas they shared with the community. Long ago, the

casual performance at a festival became specialized into an art, with its professedly trained exponents; but the essential unity of audience and drama still remains.

Let us of the audience realize our responsibilities.

CHAPTER II

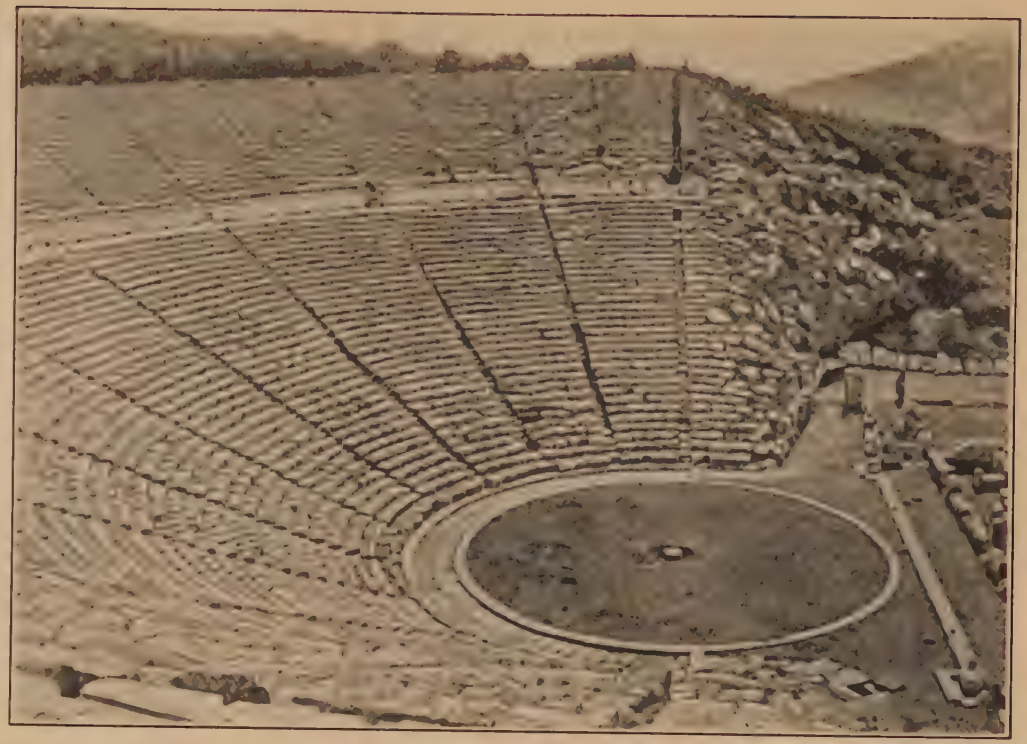
THE STAGE — PLASTIC

PRIOR to the middle of the sixteenth century audiences were not separated from the stage by a curtain. And a hundred years elapsed before this Italian device was adopted in the theaters of France, England, Germany, and Spain. This matter of the curtain represents the dividing line between the old and the modern representation of the drama. In the days before the adoption of the curtain, the stage projected into the audience, and the actors and the stage fittings were seen, as sculptors would say, "in the round." The effect of the actors was somewhat that of moving sculpture, the character of the representation was *plastic*. But with the use of a curtain, enclosed by a proscenium arch, the effect of the actors and the stage setting became rather that of a picture in its frame. The general appearance of the scene was no longer plastic but *pictorial*.

To the plastic stage belong Greek drama and the Mediæval religious and secular plays and the whole cycle of Elizabethan drama. It will be worth while to review briefly the character of these older forms of representation, and, having done so, to note the changes wrought by the pictorial system, both in its effect upon the audience and upon the stage-settings. A comparison of the two may lead us to discover that, on the one hand, we have lost something by cutting loose so completely from the plastic, and that, on the other hand, if we still hold by the pictorial, it is capable of more development than modern custom permits.

The chief advantage of the pictorial method is that it creates an illusion of reality in the environment. The characters themselves are not necessarily made to seem more real, but there is a suggestion of reality in the scene in which they play their part. This was unquestionably the reason for its adoption, and it is as noteworthy as it was natural, that the change should have been made by the Italians, during their great period of pictorial art.

For the representation of a play must approximate to the effects of the Fine Arts: architecture,



Greek Theater.

sculpture, and painting. In the great days of Athens, as during the Middle Ages, the fine arts, most highly developed, were architecture and sculpture. Therefore it is not surprising to us that the representation of the drama of those periods partook of the plastic character. Similarly, the fact that, though the Italians of the Renaissance excelled in architecture and sculpture, their greatest contribution to the Fine Arts was in painting, made it eminently natural that they should give a pictorial character to stage representations. Each case presents only another instance of how the drama grows out of and reflects the civilization of its time.

No remains of stone theaters have been discovered, earlier in date than the theater of Dionysos in Athens, which was completed in B.C. 325, that is to say, eighty-one years after the death of Euripides, the latest of the classic tragedians. His dramas and those of Sophocles and Æschylus were performed in temporary wooden theaters, similar in plan and general character to the type that subsequently prevailed in the more enduring and sumptuous theaters, erected throughout the Greek world.

It is only within the past twenty years that the type has been ascertained with reasonable certainty, through the archæological researches of the German architect, Wilhelm Dörpfeld. The chief fact which he established was the falsity of the old theory that the Greek drama was performed on an elevated stage.

The plan of the Greek theater was a semicircle or three quarters of a circle, with a flat side that formed the back of the stage. If possible, a site was chosen with a natural horseshoe of rising ground, that would afford seats for the spectators. In other cases, the amphitheater was hollowed out of the sides of a hill in terraces; or, when this was not possible, wooden scaffolding in tiers was erected in place of the rising ground. It is on record that, during the performance of one of the plays of Æschylus, the collapse of a scaffolding of this sort caused considerable loss of life and limb. It was this horseshoe of seats that the Greeks originally termed a "theater." The latter, therefore, corresponds to our word "auditorium," except that with us the auditorium also includes the floor space occupied by the orchestra stalls. This circular space in the

Greek theater was, as in our theaters, called the orchestra, but instead of being filled with spectators, was the actual stage. The drama was performed on what we now call the floor of the auditorium. The Greek audience encircled this space on three sides, the spectators in the front row having their feet on a level with the stage, the others lifted above it in rising tiers. Thus every one, whether on a level or looking down from above, had a complete view of the actors, who in the course of the action would simultaneously present the various sides of their persons to various parts of the audience. The effect, in fact, was as though a horseshoe ring of spectators should assemble round a group of statues.

This simple arrangement of spectators and stage was the natural outgrowth of the development of the Greek drama itself. The latter in Greece, as everywhere else in the world, grew out of a religious festival. On the days devoted to the special worship of Dionysos, as representing the procreative force in nature, the whole community, headed by the priest, wended their way in procession to the sacred spot, occupied by the altar of the god. Originally the sacri-

fice was a human life; but, as manners became softened, a goat (*tragos*) was substituted. Mingling in the line of villagers were young men, clothed in goat-skins, and young girls, carrying baskets of offerings for the god. The altar reached, the villagers would form a ring about it; while the priest, standing on the altar platform, performed the sacrifice, received the offerings, and, having finished the ceremony, turned about to the audience and told them of the god, his greatness, death, and resurrection. Meanwhile, for it was a people's festival, democratic in its conception and carrying out, the young men clad in goat-skins had gathered round the priest and, by their antics and sallies of homely wit, adorned the priest's tale and pointed the rude moral. So popular were they with the audience of worshipers, that in time the priest took them in hand and trained them to act in concert with one another and himself. To a slow chant they sang the praises of the god, dancing and moving their bodies and limbs in the measured cadence of the "Dithyramb." It was but a step from this to some form of dialogue between the priest and his chorus; and but another to changing the subject of the

dialogue and dithyramb from Dionysos to some other god or hero; the performance still being given around the altar in the midst of a ring of spectators. From this simple beginning, of the sacrifice of a goat (*tragos*) and the dance and chant of the dithyramb, developed the tragic drama of the classic period; while the correspondingly early and simple pranks of a band of revelers (*komos*), caricaturing their neighbors, produced in time the classic comedies of Aristophanes. Both the tragic and the comic preserved the recollection of their origin in the raised altar that occupied the center of the circular stage.

In time, however, the religious features became secondary to the idea of entertainment; and as the popularity of the latter increased, the priest gave way to the poet, who wrote and declaimed his pieces in co-operation with the chorus. Then, as the uses of the dialogue developed, the single speaker was supplemented by another and yet a third, and these conversed with one another and the chorus; until by degrees it became the custom for the three actors to play several parts.

By this time it was necessary for them to have

a place in which to change their costumes, and the *skene*, a tent or hut, was erected. At first, this "tyringe-house," as Shakespeare calls it, may have been some distance from the stage; but in time was placed immediately back of the circle of the orchestra, while to hide it from view a screen was erected in front of it. This *proscenium*, from ten to twelve feet high, stretching across the back of the stage, was originally made of posts with skins hung between; but gradually assumed the appearance of the front of a building, sometimes with a projecting colonnade, from the roof of which the actors could, if necessary, deliver their speeches. It had central doors; and, since it did not extend across the entire width of the back, there was a space at each end for the entrance both of the audience and the actors. Whether built temporarily of wood or permanently in stone or marble, this simple arrangement of theatron, (auditorium), orchestra (stage), and proscenium (back-scene) served the purposes of classic drama, both tragic and comic.

It is to be noticed that it contributed to no illusions either of place or time. It would happen sometimes that the action was supposed

to take place in front of a dwelling or palace, in which case the back-scene would be appropriate; but when the locale changed, there was nothing except the say-so of the actors and the imagination of the audience to suggest the change. Similarly, as the play was given in the open air by daylight, the effects of night or storm had to be imagined. But these limitations of illusion, as we call them, presented no trouble to the quick-witted Athenians. Both in Comedy and Tragedy they looked for the stimulation of their minds, and yielded their imaginations as readily to the promptings of the play, as we do, when we read a novel and mentally follow the action of the story, no matter where the author leads us or what the conditions of the time or weather may be that he suggests.

Since this book is not a history of the stage, it is sufficient to say of the Roman method of presentation that it was a continuation of that of the Greek. There was, however, one vital difference. Though the Roman writers based their serious and comic drama on the models of the Greek authors, they abandoned the use of a chorus. Hence the orchestra, no longer needed for the action, was given over to seats

and became, as it still remains with us, a part of the auditorium. The stage, thus withdrawn from the floor of the house, was raised, occupying a broad, deep space *in front* of the proscenium.

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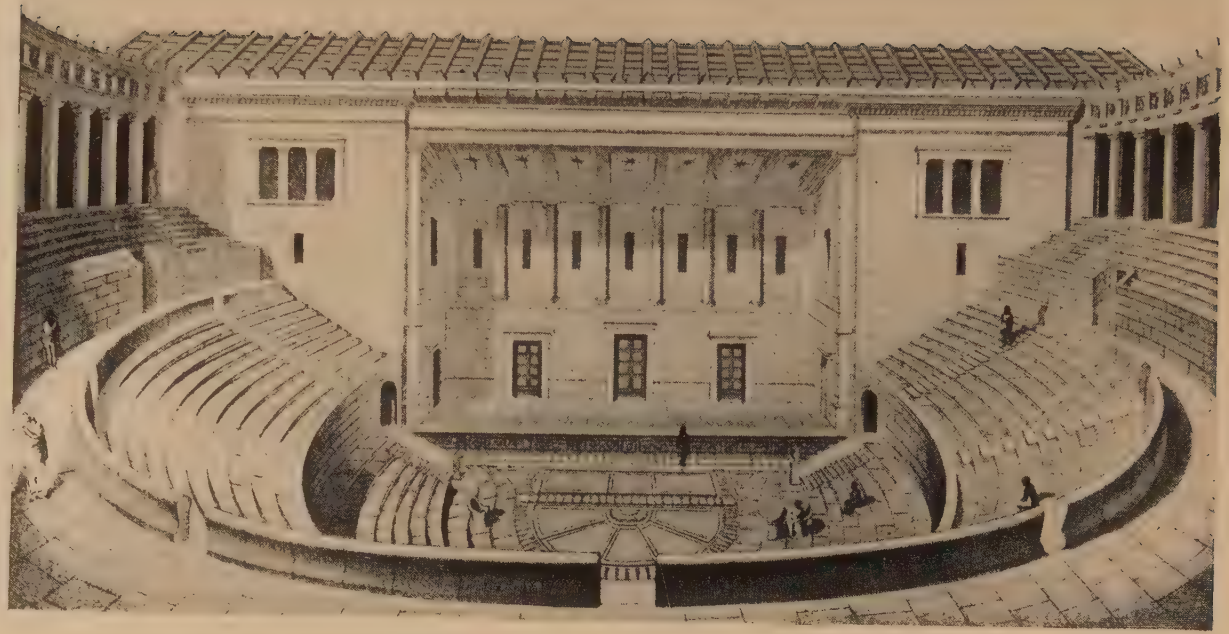
When, after the dark period following the fall of the Roman Empire, the drama began to reassert itself, its new beginnings were again identified with religious worship.

From the first the Mediæval stage was raised. Originally it was the chancel of the cathedral or church. Here, with the altar as proscenium, the clergy in their own persons or assisted by the choir, presented scenes from the Holy Bible, for the edification of the congregation that thronged the nave. For example, on the Feast Day of the Holy Innocents, December 28, the child-choristers, dressed in white, headed by a lamb, walked round the church in procession, after which they were murdered by order of Herod. Then an angel called them up to Heaven, whither they proceeded to ascend, by rising up and walking into the choir, where they sang a Te Deum. At first these "Mysteries," or, as the name implies, presentations in *action* of the Bible story, were given in Latin;



ROMAN THEATER.

but, as their popularity increased, the language of the people was substituted.

By this time, though still controlled by the clergy, the plays had ceased to be a portion of the church service. By their length and elaboration, as well, perhaps, as by the infusion of a comic element in which the devil played the leading part, they had outgrown the chancel, and were performed on a stage, at first erected against the outside wall of the church, which was still used for the actors to enter from and retire into. The presentation, though still rude was now become drama.

The oldest example, existing to-day, appears to be a French drama of the twelfth century, the manuscript of which bears the title, *Representatio Adæ*, or *The Representation of Adam.* It is a trilogy in three acts, respectively, enacting, *The Fall of Adam and Eve; the Death of Abel*, and the *Prophecies of Christ.* They are written in the Norman dialect, with stage directions in Latin, indicating scenery, gestures, and costumes — in fact, the scenery and stage business. The introductory directions are as follows.[1]

[1] I quote from that invaluable work, A History of Dramatic Art, by Karl Mantzius (Lippincott, Phila.), to whom my indebtedness throughout this and the following chapter will appear.

"Paradise shall be situated in a rather prominent place, and is to be hung all round with draperies and silk curtains to such a height that the persons who find themselves in Paradise are seen from their shoulders upward. There shall be seen sweet smelling flowers and foliage; there shall be different trees covered with fruit, so that the place may appear very agreeable. Then the Saviour (Salvator) shall appear, robed in a *dalmatica*. Adam and Eve shall place themselves in front of him; Adam dressed in a red tunic, Eve in a white garment and silk veil; both rise before *Figura* (term used for God in the M.S.), Adam nearest, bending his head, Eve lower down. Adam shall be trained well to speak at the right moment, so that he may come neither too soon nor too late. Not only he but all shall be well practised in speaking calmly, and making gestures appropriate to the things they say; they shall neither add nor omit any syllable of the metre; all shall express themselves in a distinct manner, and say in consecutive order all that is to be said."

Here we have the crude beginning of stage settings and business, intended to suggest illusion. For it is to be noted that Northern

drama, from which our own is descended, even in its beginning attempted to suggest an illusion of place, wherein it differed radically from the Greek. "Paradise shall be situated in a rather prominent place." The place that became customary was the extreme left of the stage, as the audience views it; the corresponding place at the opposite extremity being the locality of "Hell." In their simple early form each was an enclosure, hung round with draperies, above which the heads and shoulders of the occupants were visible.

Since the actors waited in these enclosures, the technical name of the latter in the Latin directions was *mansiones* — in the French *mansions*, *estats*, *lieux* — anglicized into localities or houses. In the Adam play the space between these two localities was backed by the church wall; but as, the popularity of these performances increased, they were gradually removed from the control of the clergy and from connection with the church edifice. The guilds of artizans produced them, and the stage was set up in the market place. It now became necessary to close in the stage with a background, and this was done by filling in the space between

"Heaven" and "Hell" with other enclosures or localities, representing the different changes of scene occurring in the drama.

Our illustrations, borrowed by permission from Mantzius' book, show two such stages, respectively of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century. In the earlier one we find the localities elevated above the stage level, and reached in the case of "Heaven" by a staircase, in that of "Hell" by an entrance through a dragon's jaws on a level with the stage, while a movable ladder seems to provide ascent to the others. The localities themselves appear to be wooden boxes, the fronts of which are embellished with draperies.

Upon the crudeness of this arrangement the Valenciennes stage of 1547 shows a notable advance. The localities present not only distinctive characteristics but architectural, decorative, and mechanical features. They even include a basin of water, designated the "Sea" with a ship upon it. "Hell" upon the right, is still approached through a dragon's jaws, grotesquely painted in red, green, and brown. Above are two red wheels to which the bodies of sinners are bound, while the top is guarded

by fire-spitting dragons, on one of which Lucifer himself rides astride. From this place of torment a bridge communicates with a prison in which are confined the unbaptized. Then follow in succession "The Golden Gate," "The House of the Bishops" and the "Castle." The last being supported by columns, built on a high platform that extends far into the stage. After this come "Jerusalem," the "Temple," the latter forming a sort of pendant to the "Castle"; "Nazareth," approached through a gate, and finally "Heaven," or "Paradise." The lower part of this locality is designated "The Hall." Above it is a circular structure in the center of which is God the Father, surrounded by four allegorical figures of Peace, Charity, Truth, and Justice. Behind this group, as the manuscript directs, "a golden wheel is turning incessantly," and the outermost circle supports flying angels.

These two illustrations enable us to picture the character of the stage on which the Mediæval dramas were performed; namely, the "Mysteries," or presentation in action of the Bible story and the lives of the Saints; "Passion Plays," enacting the sufferings of Christ; "Miracle Plays," in which the tangle of the plot

was dissolved by the intervention of the Virgin; and the "Moralities" in which the virtues and vices were allegorically characterized. In the recent revival of the fifteenth century Morality, *Everyman*, we had an opportunity of seeing the "localities" in actual operation. The back of the stage, it will be remembered, was enclosed with a wall in which were openings, covered at the commencement of the play with curtains. In the center, raised high above the stage level and surmounted by a canopy, or baldacchino, was the tomb, somewhat suggesting the appearance of a high altar, and offering opportunities for grouping that recalled the dignified composition of a Flemish altarpiece. While the main action of the play was performed on the front part of the stage, Everyman at times approached one of the openings, when the curtain was drawn back, revealing one of the characters — Riches, Good-Deeds — with whom the dialogue was carried on. When this particular scene was finished the curtains were redrawn. If, as no doubt is the case, there exists authority for the use of the curtain, it shows the intermediate step between the old one of the actors taking their places in their several locali-

ties at the start of the play and remaining throughout in full view of the audience, and the later development of providing buildings with doorways to screen the performers, until their presence was demanded by the action.

So numerous were the people eager to see the Valenciennes Passion Play, that its performances were continued for twenty-five days. To obviate the expenses and interruption of business involved in these prolonged events, and yet to accommodate the crowd, the single stage with its variety of localities was sometimes replaced by a number of separate platforms or floats on wheels. Each of these, corresponding to a single locality, had its own stage settings and company of actors, who performed some single scene of the drama. The city was marked off into stations, to each of which in rotation every float proceeded. The scene concluded, the float would be drawn to the next station, and its place taken by the following one, and so on. The whole play by this means, was served up, as it were, in a succession of courses to the whole community, who gathered in the streets and filled the adjoining windows.

But, for our present purpose, the chief point

of interest to be deduced from a study of the Mediæval stage-arrangements is the hint it gives of the need and taste of the audience. They were unable, like the Athenians, to take anything for granted or to supplement the action of the play with their own imaginations. With them, seeing was believing. They demanded to have the change of scene visualized; crudely enough to our eyes, but still emphatically. Further, their appetite increased for spectacular and realistic effects, for having the tortures of the saints, the torment of the damned, and the rewards of the blest, represented actually before their eyes. To satisfy this the engineer and mechanician were as essential as the playwright and the actor. In time they became more so. The tendency was continually towards swamping the actual drama in an elaboration of spectacular and mechanical contrivances. Indeed, those forefathers of ours in the matter of taste were very like ourselves.

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So long as these performances were promoted by the guilds and backed by the resources of a city, vying in magnificence and patronage with some rival city, or by an "angel," in the

person of some rich merchant or nobleman, who may or may not have had ulterior political motives, the enormous expense that they entailed was no bar to their production. But such expenditure became impossible when the drama passed from the hands of amateurs into those of professionals.

This was the change that marked the period of the Renaissance. There had been professional actors before the sixteenth century; men and even women who, beginning as amateurs in their own city, attained such celebrity that other cities were willing to pay for their occasional services. But in England of the Elizabethan time professional actors were sufficiently numerous and distinct as a class to form themselves into companies. Sometimes a nobleman would include such a company in his retinue, and they would be known as "My Lord So-and-So's servants." Gradually, however, the patronage became more nominal. As the actors had no political status except that of "rogues and vagabonds," it was necessary for them to secure immunity from arrest and interference by attaching themselves to some person in authority. They were still styled "servants,"

as in the case of Shakespeare's own company, "The Earl of Leicester's Servants," but they were dependent for a livelihood on the receipts at the box-office.

By this time, however, the performances were removed from the open air into buildings, roofed over at least for the audience. Sometimes the stage was set up in a hall; but in Elizabethan England theaters began to appear, erected, however, not as in former times by a municipality, but by a private individual, as a business investment, conducted on the ordinary principle of supply and demand. Lavish expenditure was out of the question. The structure of the theater and its stage equipments had to conform to the necessities of making the drama pay.

The earliest theater in London was erected by the actor and master-carpenter, James Burbage, father of Richard Burbage, the famous tragedian of Shakespeare's company. He called it "The Theater." It was constructed of wood, as were probably all the other theaters that speedily grew up: "The Curtain," "The Rose," "The Hope," "The Globe," "The Swan." The exterior of all of these, it is supposed, cor-

responded to a print of The Globe Theater, still in existence, which shows an octagonal building running up like a tower, with windows in the upper stories, and a roof round the ring of the walls, leaving the center open to the sky. Similarly, a drawing of "The Swan," made by a Dutch traveler, Johan De Witt, probably in 1596, is assumed to be the type of interior, represented in all the theaters of the period. It shows an arena or "pit" without seats, where the "groundlings" disported themselves, and three surrounding galleries, the topmost of which is roofed over. Above these projects a tower from which the trumpeter announced that the performance was about to begin. The upper story of this tower may have been used as a storeroom for costumes and properties; the lower one was certainly the dressing-room of the actors, the "tyringe house," or, as in the Greek theater, the "skene." From this two doors lead on to the stage, and above them is a wide window, that would serve the purpose of the arcade roof in the Greek theater. From this, when the action demanded it, the actors could converse with those below; Juliet, for example, with Romeo.

Projecting above this window, and extending to some distance down the stage, was a roof supported on two columns. This might, no doubt, afford shelter to the actors in rainy weather; but its practicability for the business of the action was of more importance. It was hung round on three sides with curtains. Through these Hamlet stabbed Polonius; or, when the front ones were drawn back, the play scene would be revealed; while all of them could be drawn, if the action demanded the full stage. The stage itself, as in the Greek theater, was surrounded on three sides by spectators. It was from the space beneath it that the Ghost may have cried "Swear," for Hamlet says: "You hear this fellow in the cellarage."

Though there is no record of Shakespeare's company acting in "The Swan," his own playhouse, "The Globe," was much such a structure; so that in this print one sees the actual conditions under which his tragedies and comedies were produced. Again, as in the Greek times, the performance was by daylight and no illusion of place or time was attempted. The only "property" shown in the drawing is a bench, which probably was brought on when

needed and then removed. Similarly, a few other properties, rocks and so forth, may have been introduced to help the action; but, if so, they must have been constructed with a view to being seen from all sides. They were of a plastic character, like the stage settings and the movements of the actors. Thus the period enriched with the noblest drama since the age of Pericles is marked by a return to the stage simplicity of Classic times; and not even to the simple dignity of the Greek permanent theater, but to the still simpler form that characterized the temporary wooden fixtures in which the dramas of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were performed. When further we recall the fact, that the conditions under which Molière laid the foundations of modern comedy were nearly as simple as those that surround the tragedies and comedies of Shakespeare, and that Ibsen's dramas which have had the most potent influence in modern times demand but the simplest settings, we realize how independent the drama at its best is of the accidents of material surroundings.

I do not hope to dissuade any reader from the enjoyment of a beautiful *mis-en-scène*. I

would not try to do so, for I myself enjoy it; believing that there is a place on the stage for the pomp and grandeur of the spectacular. Yet the fact remains, and it should regulate the tenor of this book, that the spectacular is not essential to the drama in its highest forms. It appeals to something in ourselves that is below the highest possibilities of appreciation: namely, those which are concerned with our intellectual and spiritual consciousness.

In conclusion, however, to be fair to our own generation, I will quote from Sir Philip Sydney, who cannot be accused of lack of intellect or imagination. Yet he derides the simple arrangements of the Elizabethan stage in the following words: —

"Where you shall have Asia on the one side and Afric of the other, and so many other under kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is (or else the tale will not be conceived). Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that

comes out a hideous monster, with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave. While, in the meantime, two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field."

Perhaps, therefore, the simplicity of the stage settings was the result, not so much of superior intelligence on the part of the audience, as of inferior resources on the part of the management.

CHAPTER III

THE STAGE — PICTORIAL

IN the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Valenciennes stage, that we have already noticed, represented the elaborate form of the Mediæval Passion Play, the Italians were attempting to revive the dignity of the ancient Roman theater. Their effort was, of course, a phase of the revival of classic literature that had possessed the Italian imagination of the Renaissance. It was in the courts of the nobles that the new culture flourished, and here were given plays founded upon the Classic models. At first the stage was simply a platform, backed with draperies which were frequently decorated by celebrated artists. Thus, Raphael painted the curtains for a performance of the *Suppositi* by Ariosto, and the painted draperies by Mantegna, which are now among the treasures of Hampton Court, were originally used in a performance at the ducal court of Gonzagha, in Mantua.

AN EARLY ENGLISH MYSTERY PLAY.

After an engraving from Sharp's "Coventry Mysteries."

Later, when actual theaters came to be erected, they were of a temporary character. One, however, was of such magnificence that it was allowed to remain. This was the Olympian Theater in Vicenza, built in 1565, by the famous architect, Palladio. The illustration shows a projecting, semicircular stage, backed by a lofty façade. To this extent the design approximates the model of the Roman theater. But the façade is pierced with arches, beyond which appear three streets, flanked by buildings, which were not painted on the flat, but actually built in relief, diminishing in size to produce a sense of perspective, so that the house, furthest removed, did not exceed two feet. The illusion of this would have been destroyed, if the actors had placed themselves in close contact with the small buildings, so that clearly the entrances and exits were made from the part of the streets farthest down the stage. A study of the illustration will show how ingeniously the buildings are detached and the main streets crossed by narrower ones to provide a variety of entrances, and how effectively the rake of the rows of buildings masks the background.

This festival theater was, of course, too elaborate and expensive for professional purposes, yet its principles were adopted with modification. The pierced arches, and the fact that on Palladio's stage some of the action was performed behind the arches, certainly suggested putting the whole of the action behind a proscenium frame. In two prints of the period which have been preserved, this arrangement is shown. The stage has become a large box, with one side open to the audience, and within the box the entire action is represented. One of these, intended for comedy, shows a street scene, "boxed in" with practicable buildings, so that entrances and exits could be made through the doors, as well as by the side alleys. The other, intended probably for tragedies, exhibits a public place, similarly surrounded with practicable structures, which, however, are of imposing design. In this case it is noticeable that the drawing actually indicates the pilasters of the proscenium arch.

By this time both the practicability and desirability of a curtain, separating the stage from the audience, had been established. At first, it may have been customary to keep the

curtain raised until the finish of the play, for the Italian practice was to have one characteristic setting for the entire piece. "Three decorations," writes the artist Serlio in 1545, are sufficient for all kinds of plays. "The first, which is intended for a comedy or farce, represents a tolerably narrow and deep street, with numerous shops with signs, and houses, all of which allows of multiplying the episodes during the action of the play. The second, intended for tragedy, is a public place in a severe style, like the Piazzo della Signoria in Florence. Finally, for idylls, mythological plays, and ballets, a sylvan decoration. The two first mentioned are built of light material, timberwork covered with canvas; the last, simply painted."

In France, whither the Italian method was the first to travel, there had been a form of stage setting that grew out of the arrangement of localities, such as we have seen in the Valenciennes play. Known as *le decor simultané*, it represented another step in the direction of illusion. With the same idea of providing for change of scenes during the action of the piece, it varied the architectural structures with others

more nearly approaching the realistic suggestion. Thus Leon Mahelot, a scene-painter and machinist, at the Hotel de Bourgogne during the first half of the seventeenth century, has left a record of *le decor simultané*, as arranged for a play called *Agarite*, by Durval. For this, five separate decorations were set simultaneously, remaining in view during the whole performance. Nearest to the audience, on the right, was a castle, or rather, a fragment of a wall with a moat and vault; opposite, on the left, a part of a house, from which through a large window was a view into a painter's studio. Higher up stage, on this side was a garden, opposite to which appeared a church wall, some tombs and a big bell. The background showed the interior of a room with a magnificent bed.

This sounds like a strange jumble of effects, but some kind of harmony was given to them by the skill of the scene painter. It was an arrangement that, as Mantzius says, was much nearer to our modern notions than the Mediæval platform-stage. But the "Simultaneous Decoration" passed away when the French adopted the Italian example. In its place came

the use of a few "stock" scenes: "a street," "a public place," or "a classical colonnade," "a forest," and "an interior." The latter had five doors, symmetrically placed; one in the background, and at the sides two "upper entrances" and two "lower entrances." It was for an interior of this sort that several of Molière's comedies, *Tartuffe*, for example, *Le Misanthrope*, and *L'Avare*, were written and are so completely adapted, that to this day they cannot be acted in any other kind of scene.

From the practice of using one of these stock "sets" during the whole play, it was but a step to the use of several for different scenes; and from this to the adoption of a great variety of specially prepared settings was but a question of time. It was an inevitable concession to the continued demand of the audience for more and more elaboration. This included, as in Mediæval days, a demand upon the machinist quite as much as on the scene painter and property man. And the stage tricks that the three developed had by the middle of the eighteenth century anticipated the most complicated effects of the modern stage. There was, perhaps, only one particu-

lar in which they fell short of ours — namely, in the lighting.

As long as the stage was in the open air and the performances by daylight, the lighting presented no problem. With the removal, however, of the stage indoors, and the demand of fashion for evening performances, it became a question that exercised both the ingenuity and the pockets of the managers. The use of wax candles in chandeliers, hanging from the ceiling or in brackets, arranged at the sides of the stage, was all very well for the rich in their private entertainments. But for the professional manager, except on ceremonial occasions, the expense was prohibitive. He was forced to rely on oil lamps and, in the smaller theaters, on tallow candles. In England the footlights are still called "the floats"; a survival of the time when a tin-lined trench stretched across the front of the stage, filled with oil, on which floated metal discs through which the wicks were drawn. A man was on duty to snuff these, pull them further through, and also to stand by with a stick that had a sponge on the end of it soaked in water, against emergency of fire.

Such a condition of lighting represents in our

imagination a strange contrast to the brilliant possibilities that came in with the use of gas and have been developed by the substitution of electricity.

But, while we congratulate ourselves on the superior lighting possibilities of the modern stage, do not let us be blind to the inadequate way in which they are utilized. To-day, one man standing at a switchboard can absolutely control the whole of the lighting effects; reducing or increasing the quantity of the light, changing its quality and color, instantaneously or by degrees. There is probably no conceivable effect that is not attainable. Yet, what do we get? As a general rule "lights up" — a blare of illumination. And why? Because we, the audience, are supposed to like it; and I fear we do. We are for the most part like unheeding children, attracted most by what is brightest. But childlike, we are also fond of change, so we are treated to sunrises and sunsets; or at least in our heedlessness we accept them for such; rapid-transit changes in the color of the light, that dapple the canvas scenery with purple, green, and amber patches till the whole thing suggests a Gargantuan Neapolitan ice-cream.

Or our sense of fitness, if we have any, is affronted by an effect so ridiculously crude as one that I recall in a recent elaborate production of *Peer Gynt*. The scene was composed of a series of cut-cloths representing trees and foliage, the whole showing the vista of a wood. It was flooded with bright yellow light, except in the front plane where the "star" actor stood, bathed in the white calcium light. Notwithstanding the resources at his disposal to create an illusion of nature, he permitted two different qualities of light to appear in the same scene.

In another play lately, as Don Quixote rode upon the scene, his spear cast its shadow on a distant snow mountain. These are but samples of the innumerable incongruities and falsities of effect that the ignorance or carelessness of managers foists upon an ignorant and careless public. Yet what is the very simple truth of the whole matter? We aim at illusion and the stage setting has become a picture. Therefore it must be governed by pictorial considerations.

Now the painter of an easel picture, if he is seeking an illusion of nature, makes particular study of the effects of natural light. He does so for two reasons: firstly, to increase the illusion

of nature in the picture; secondly, to infuse it with sentiment.

As to the first point, the natural effect. Everything in nature is enveloped in lighted atmosphere, even the shadows holding a certain quantity of light. The effect is to soften the outlines of trees and objects, to merge their details into masses, and, as they recede from the eye, to make them greyer and more indistinct because of the intervening layers of atmosphere. We can see this effect of "aerial perspective" whenever we look down the street, or across the fields. How often do we see it when we look across the footlights?

If we study nature a little, we shall find that the lighted atmosphere is the source of some of the most beautiful effects. Why then do we not see it reproduced on the stage? I am aware that the scene painter has provided for this atmospheric suggestion in the painting of the back-cloth; but why is the effect of the latter not blended with the foreground that all the gradations may be maintained? and why does the glaring light contradict, as it so often does, the kind of light that the artist has represented on his back-cloth? For one of two reasons:

either he does not trouble himself about the way in which his scenery is lighted; or, more generally, because he is not allowed to have his say, and any attempt on his part to complete his artistic intention is shut off by a manager who "cares for none of these things," because he knows nothing about them. He could not tell a bad easel picture from a good one, so what shall he know about stage pictures?

And here is another point. The real picture-artist is concerned not only with the quantity, but also with the quality of the light. He knows, as we ourselves do, when we come to think of it, that the quality of the light varies, according to the locality, whether it is north or south, or in the plains, valleys, mountains, also according to the season of the year and the time of day. In each case there will be some special quality of light; and it will be by the faithful rendering of its appearance that he will create the illusion in his picture. For the modern picture-painter is not satisfied with generalities. The illusion he tries for is one of intimate truth to nature, compared with which the happy-go-lucky attempts at stage illusion are mere child's play.

But why, it may be asked, should stage illu-

sion aim at a corresponding intimacy of natural effect? Because, and here we have the very kernel of the whole matter, such intimacy is a source — the chief source — of emotional or spiritual suggestion. For the chief note of the modern painter is expression. The painter is not satisfied merely to represent appearances, he wishes to express the feeling with which the appearances inspire him; or, if you prefer it, to interpret the appearances so that they shall express his own mood. And a response to that mood, or sometimes an incentive to it, he finds in what he calls the moods of nature: that is to say, in the changes of expression which pass over the face of nature, according to the quantity or quality of the lighted atmosphere. Thus in pictures, both of outdoor and indoor scenes, he relies upon the rendering of light to arouse in us, when we look at his picture, the kind of feeling that inspired him to paint it.

When, for example, Israels, the Dutch artist, paints a picture of a fisherman, seated in the desolation of his grief beside the dead body of his wife, how does he stir our emotion? Partly, it is true, by the figures. He depicts an expression of hopeless loneliness on the man's face and

in the stolid droop of his figure, and contrasts with these the straight, thin form beneath the sheet and the white, pinched, yet peaceful face upon the pillow. But the artist has done much more. He also has invested the figures with an atmosphere that helps to interpret the sentiment of the subject. He has rendered the light, as it struggles in through the little window, the cold white light of early morning. It glances on the faces and figures and illuminates portions of the room, while other parts are dim with silvery shadows. The light stirs in our imagination a feeling of chill and hardness, mingled with a certain tenderness, and a suggestion of the mystery that surrounds life and death. Had the artist omitted this envelope of lighted atmosphere around the figures, his picture would have lost more than half its expression and power to move us.

Is not the applicability of this to the stage picture quite clear? It is not enough that the latter should merely indicate the locality, it should also contribute to the locality its proper atmosphere of expression. There should be a unity of feeling between the characters and their surroundings, otherwise the picture is not

complete. Yet it is the rarest thing to see this harmony attained, or even tried for, in a stage picture. Nor would it necessarily involve a great expenditure. On the contrary, what is needed is not lavish outlay of money, but artistic knowledge and feeling; such, for example, as was shown in a performance of "The Vikings," given by the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts under the direction of Mr. Franklin Sargent. The scene was simple — a pile of cliffs on the left, a fishing hut on the right, and between them a view of ocean and sky. The effectiveness was due mainly to the lighting, which suggested a gloomy, lowering atmosphere, charged with the possibilities of tempest. Enveloped in this, the scene took on a crude appearance, as though it were part, as indeed it was, of an untamed, primitive world, foreboding the clash of rude passions that were to wake its empty, silent echoes. What was the result? Though the actors were young and inexperienced students, their efforts were reinforced by the atmosphere of expression that enveloped them; and the performance was extraordinarily impressive.

There was another feature of this stage set-

ting that added to the impressiveness. As I have said, the foreground contained only a sandy stretch, with cliffs on one side and a hut on the other. Both hut and cliffs were built up in actual relief; the one could be entered, the other climbed over by an ascending path that led up to a considerable height. This arrangement illustrated the effectiveness of simplicity and of plastic scenery: two subjects which in connection with atmospheric effect are occupying the attention of artistic managers to-day. So far as the substitution of plastic scenery in relief for the ordinary flat-painted scene is concerned, it is a return to what was the practice, as we have seen, of the Italians, when they first set their stage picture behind a frame. That the most artistic nation of the modern world, at its highest period of artistic activity, should have made the scenery plastic, is of itself an argument in favor of the practice. And a little reflection, I believe, will prove that the reason which prompted it equally holds good to-day. For the point of start is that, though the stage scene has approximated since 1545 to a picture, it must differ in a very vital particular. A picture only *suggests* the third dimen-

sion of depth, the stage setting actually *includes* it. It therefore demands that, as far as possible, the detailed effects of depth should be actually real. In a picture the artist can treat the figures and the surroundings in a similar spirit of make-believe; he can adjust both to the illusion of depth. But on the stage the figures themselves necessarily have actual depth; wherever they stand, they are recognized to be real. The scenery, then, must be forced up, as far as practicable, to a corresponding degree of reality; otherwise there will not be a unity of feeling between them and their surroundings. And the latter, for this purpose, must as far as possible be plastic.

That is the simple argument; and its reasonableness can be illustrated in almost any ordinary modern production. The curtain goes up, for example, on a woodland scene, and for a moment there is a fair suggestion of natural illusion. But no sooner has an actor come on the scene, than the illusion is lessened. His form stands out from its surroundings with an assurance of bulk that the flat-painted scene cannot live up to. Alongside of his reality, the latter, to a careful eye, suggests the make-

believe that it is. But let the actor come forward to where a "practicable" tree-trunk stands, with a bench around it, and immediately, if we confine our vision to the figure and the tree and the bench, they are all united in a common suggestion of reality.

Two of the best out-of-door effects recently produced on our professional stage were the second act of *The Great Divide*, and the single scene of *Sappho and Phaon*. And the reason of their superiority was, to a very large extent, that reliance had been placed on plastic scenery. The former represented a rocky eminence with a shanty to one side. All the foreground was modeled in actual relief, leaving only the distant view of the sky and plain to be suggested by a back-cloth. Since the latter was at a distance, where the performers never came into direct and close contact with it, the illusion of reality was unimpaired. The setting of *Sappho and Phaon* was in itself far more lovely; but that is another matter. Its effectiveness was secured by the temple front on the right being constructed of columns and pediments in actual relief, set upon a stylobate or platform, approached by steps, which were built into a rocky eminence

that also was in actual relief. So were the altar, in the center of the background, and the statues and the shrubs and the tree stems among which they stood; the distance only, as in the previous case, being suggested on the flat. Not only was the empty scene as beautiful as could be desired; but, when the actors came on, there was nowhere any jar between their own reality and the real appearance of their surroundings.

The only practical objection to this is the extra cost of construction and the greater inconvenience of transporting such plastic scenery from city to city. But the latter difficulty can be lessened by the ingenuity of the stage carpenter, in constructing the scene so that it can be conveniently packed up, and it was an objection that evidently did not weigh with Mr. Miller or Mr. Fiske. As to the cost, it too can be kept down by lessening the number of stage accessories, so that the scene shall contain only the salient characteristic features appropriate to the play. This would tend to that desirable result, which, by the way, is a feature of some of the finest art — a synthesis of effect, a simplicity of the parts, promoting increased effectiveness of the whole.

This use of plastic scenery that I am urging has for more than thirty years been adopted in interiors. Many of us can remember the time when, for example, a library-set with its cornice, bookshelves, fireplace, doors, and window frames was painted entirely on the flat in a perspective, the point of sight of which was supposed to be the center of the front of the first balcony. What was the result? From every other part of the house the perspective was more or less false. Further, when a door or window was opened, the walls of this grand library were found to have a solid depth of one inch and a half, and they waved in the wind when an actor banged the door. Of, if he approached the fireplace, the reality of his appearance soon manifested the sham of the mantelpiece and its painted clock and vase.

Nowadays, however, not always, but in all up-to-date scenes, the projections are modeled in relief; the door-frames show the proper depth; the ornaments and fittings seem as real as the furniture, and the dejected heroine can rest her arm upon a real mantelpiece. It is the extension of this principle to out-of-door scenes that is occupying the attention of modern

progressive managers; when, that is to say, their progressiveness is not merely commercial but is prompted by artistic enterprise.

With some, however, there is a tendency to ignore the lessons of modern pictorial art. These are towards simplicity and synthesis. It is not by a profusion of detail, but by the careful selection of what is salient and characteristic, that the best pictorial art is now distinguished; and by the massing of effects. The eye then is not distracted by a multitude of trivialities, but receives a harmonious impression of the whole scene.

Similarly, to crowd the stage with a quantity of detail and to load the action of the piece with innumerable touches of "business" may help to disguise the thinness of a poor play, but will interfere with the impressiveness of a good one. They are introduced to increase the illusion of reality, and, because they seem to do so, are applauded by the thoughtless.

But what is the reality they suggest? Is it their own reality, considered separately, or the reality of that vastly more important thing, the scene considered as a whole? If they disturb the impression of the latter, or delay the main purpose of the action, their introduction may

afford a trivial satisfaction to the ignorant, but it is bad in art. For art implies some central motive, into harmony with which all the contributory details are subordinated. The whole point is that such managers who indulge in this superabundance of triviality are trying to imitate nature in their stage-picture, instead of translating nature into terms of art. They appeal to the audience's ignorance of what art really is; just as do some painters of easel-pictures. People buy the latter because they "look so natural." In fact, probably seventy per cent. of American collectors begin with this class of picture; only, however, to get rid of them in a short time, as their taste and knowledge improve.

So once more, as always, we are face to face with the responsibility of the audience for the character and quality of the stage production. The majority will probably always be ignorant of art, and content with petty realism because it "looks so natural." Meanwhile, the minority, which it may be hoped will increase in numbers, will, like the average collector of pictures, outgrow the childish appreciation of mere realism, and demand its subordination to the artistic ensemble.

Mystery Performance in the Fifteenth Century.
The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia. After a title-page by Jehan Fouquet.
(See page 36.)

CHAPTER IV

THE ACTOR

THE actor, Shakespeare makes Hamlet say, should "hold the mirror up to nature." It is a statement that, notwithstanding so great an authority, is to be accepted with a considerable grain of salt.

In the first place, such a definition of acting will not apply to the classic Greek drama, or to that of Oriental countries, India for example, China and Japan. In the second place, it is too easily interpreted to mean that good acting consists in being natural; it confuses the distinction that separates nature from art. It would be truer to say that, while an actor should take nature for his model, just as a painter does, he, no more than the latter, should merely imitate it. Instead he should give a synthesis of nature, colored with his own personality. Thus, acting, considered as an art, is not imitation but interpretation, with opportunities of being creative.

This is a conception of acting pretty nearly obliterated in America. And the reason is, that to-day either a play is written to suit the personal idiosyncrasies of such and such a "star" performer; or search is made for people who in real life are as nearly as possible like the characters in the play. And, since the majority of plays represent modern life, the performers conduct themselves on the stage as they do off it. They are not acting, but simply being themselves.

But we will consider this point presently. I only mention it now to show the trend of this discussion.

To return to the inconsistency of Shakespeare's definition with the conditions of Greek acting. So far as we know anything about the subject, the Greek actor of the classic period must have relied very little upon suggesting an illusion of nature. Appearing in the open air and before large audiences, he had to increase the effectiveness of his person. He raised himself by binding high wooden clogs on his feet. These must have interfered with the speed and naturalness of his movements. He is represented on vases as wearing a mask. Whether this custom was usual or exceptional is disputed.

But, on the occasions that the mask was worn, the immobile features, exaggerated so as to "carry far," would still further lessen any illusion of naturalness. Even if the supposition is unwarrantable that some instrument was fitted into the mask at the mouth, or possibly carried by the actor in his own mouth, to increase the volume of his voice, at least the necessity of making his words reach the ears of seventeen thousand people — the present estimate of the audience in the theater of Dionysos — would oblige him to speak with a deliberation that was unnatural. In fact, whatever may have been the actual conditions of Greek acting, they must have been such as to render impossible any nuances of facial, vocal, and gestural expression. The effects aimed at must have been simple, broad, and emphatic.

As the actor waited for his voice to carry, so he no doubt held his pose that it also might carry. Moreover, since the drama still retained some flavor of its original religious motive and was an outgrowth of the Dithyramb, it is reasonable to suppose that a certain ceremonial solemnity still affected the poses and gestures, and some form of chanting or cantilation

characterized the speech. So one imagines Greek acting to have presented a series of slowly changing rhythmic movements accompanied by sonorous utterance; groupings and re-groupings of living statuary; even the orotund resonance of the vocal delivery having something of a plastic quality. Such, at least, we picture it in the Æschylean drama. With Sophocles there may have been more approach to natural suggestion, as there must have been still more in the emotional melodramas of Euripides. Thus, in its origin and at its best, Greek acting did not vie with nature but rather expressed itself by symbol.

It has been said that all great art involves a certain quality of symbolism. Symbolism, observe, not allegory, with which some people confuse it. Allegory is the embodiment in human form of an abstract idea; the abstract idea of humanity, for example, in the person of "Everyman"; and of "Riches," "Good-Deeds," or "Fellowship," in an actual person, whose appearance and speech, if any, shall suggest the character. The great example of this in our literature is "The Pilgrim's Progress," which is a matured outgrowth of the allegorical Moral-

ity plays of the Middle Ages. From the same source also sprang the motive of allegorical representation that abounds in the altar-pieces and decorative paintings of the Renaissance. To the people of that age, the cultured and ignorant alike, allegory spoke with meaning. To our own eye, I believe it does not. The attempt to write a modern Morality play along those lines is a mistake, because in our literature and to our habit of thinking so crude a representation of character has been superseded by character-studies, intimate and searching. Meanwhile the capacity for appreciating symbolism has grown.

Symbolism may be connected with some object in a picture or some definite thing in a drama, or it may in some more subtle way pervade the atmosphere of the theme. Sargent's painting, for example, in the Boston Public Library, contains a row of angels bearing, respectively, a crown of thorns, a ladder, a spear, and so forth, which we recognize at once as symbols or emblems of the Passion of Christ. Ordinarily a sponge or ladder would arouse no mental emotions; but here, seen in relation to the rest of the subject, it acquires a meaning

that excites a train of thought or of spiritual experience. Similarly, the repeated mention of the drain in Mr. Kennedy's *The Servant in the House* awakes an intellectual and spiritual consciousness, that becomes to our imagination the symbol of an idea, underlying the whole structure of the plot. In the use of this symbol the author proves himself a student of Ibsen, in whose dramas such forms of symbolism abound.

But there is a form of symbolism even more evasive than this, where nothing is shown or said definitely to direct our thought and yet a consciousness is aroused; and it is in its possession of this, I imagine, that all great art may be said to involve a quality of symbolism. I do not know how better to describe it than that a work of art, possessing it, creates its own atmosphere of æsthetic and intellectual and spiritual suggestion. The forms, the colors, the sounds, indirectly stimulate our senses and through them convey an unexplainable but perfectly realized stimulus to the mind or to the spiritual imagination.

It was in this sense, we may believe, that the Greek art of acting was preëminently symbolic. The sound of the voices was not such as would

ordinarily be associated with the meaning of the words; even the poses, gestures, and movements had less of individual and separate meaning than a capacity to create a sustained harmony of impression. The actors wove around themselves an atmosphere of spiritual suggestion, that permeated the consciousness of the vast audience.

In a modern revival of a Greek drama it would be futile and certainly unconvincing to attempt an exact reproduction of the form of Greek acting. The vocal and physical technique would seem artificial; being altogether removed from our modern need of having some illusion of nature introduced. We demand at least some compromise between the natural method and the symbolism of Greek acting. Recognizing this fact and pursuing it to a logical conclusion, the German author, H. von Hofmannsthal, has reconstructed the *Electra* of Sophocles, to adjust the theme to modern motives and conditions. He was not satisfied merely to modernize the form of the acting, he must modernize also that of which the acting was the expression, the spiritual motive of the drama. It is no longer the inexorable workings of Destiny, avenging

a wrong done to Divine Law; it has become the personal desire for vengeance of a woman who has had a wrong done to herself. Electra and the others have ceased to be pawns in the move of Destiny, symbols of man's helplessness in its inevitable and invincible grip; they are become individuals, no longer swayed from without, but goaded from within. In point of time they have been brought down, at least to that of Shakespeare. The symbolism that their acting involves is an expression of the heroic and romantic motives that inspired Shakespeare and have been continued through Corneille, Racine, Goethe, Schiller, Victor Hugo, down to our own days in Rostand.

These dramatists, selected from a long role of heroic and romantic writers, are to the modern world what the classic tragic poets were to the old. By them, however, the motive has been brought down to earth; and the persons of the drama have become characters, and the acting expressive of personality. But although the drama has come down to earth, it has not yet reached the level of every-day life, it is still upon the heights. In the first place, it is poetic in form; neither the thought nor the speech

is familiar, every-day currency. Secondly, it is mostly concerned with exalted persons, or at least with conditions of exalted emotion, and with situations lifted above ordinary experience. If the personages are no longer symbols, as in Greek drama, they are not yet the flesh and blood individuals of familiar life — they are types.

In a sense, no doubt, all characters, whether in a modern novel or in a drama, are types; they embody certain qualities that are shared by thousands. Yet, as compared with the intimate analysis that an Ibsen or Sudermann applies to character-study, the characterization of the heroic and romantic authors is not individual but, in a pronounced way, typal.

This fact affects the acting. It calls for a method that again contradicts Shakespeare's advice to hold the mirror up to nature. We recognize, of course, that he had in mind the extravagances of certain tempestuous fellows who would catch the ear of the groundlings by mere noise and fume, by tearing a passion to tatters. The actor must not overleap the bounds of nature. But that he should behave as ordinary men and women would naturally

behave if confronted with similar conditions of emotion, Shakespeare probably did not mean to imply. At any rate the practice of all the best actors and the best traditions of acting in the Heroic and Romantic drama are opposed to it.

The point is, that acting, being an art, has its conventions, and they will differ according to the form of the art and the motive prompting the choice of that form. When the form is, poetical, and the motive heroic or romantic, the conventions must involve a broader and more highly colored method than when the form is prose and the motive is to depict real life. Yet this distinction is overlooked by audiences and by actors; the reason being that in this country at the present moment we have almost forgotten that acting is an art.

The distinction may be paralleled in painting by the difference between a Dutch genre picture and a Venetian mural painting. The latter is by comparison, a vast canvas, characterized by decorative display, filling the eye with the amplitude of its composition and the sweeping grandeur of its line. It is so that a heroic or romantic play, especially if it be poetic, fills the imagination. I do not mean that it need be or

should be accompanied by spectacular accessories. That is another question. I am thinking rather of its theme, and the mental picture that the latter creates. It is, in fact, on a heroic scale, and to this the acting must be keyed.

The actor must have a presence that fills the eye; that creates a suggestion of bigness, distinction, and more than ordinary impressiveness. In silence, as in speech, in moving, as when motionless, his presence must have weight and carrying power. He may not be, like the elder Salvini, of monumental stature, but he must have the capacity, such as Booth had, of creating a monumental impression. Again, as in the old paintings, where the artist gave to his figures a perfection of form, the actor must train his body to be an instrument of perfect expression, of beauty in some parts, of character in all. Then for his gestures, they too must share the characteristics of the grand style in painting, the free sweep of rhythmic movement. The heroic and romantic drama calls for a greater quantity of gesture, and gesture of a more pronounced kind, than the realistic drama needs. It represents an exalted view of life and emotion, and it demands a certain exag-

geration of style, and in some kinds of romantic drama even a certain flamboyancy.

I know that in recent years there has been an attempt to represent the poetic drama in a more "natural" way; to colloquialize the verse, and reduce the amount and scope of gesture. It is a welcome change from much that was bombastic, mouthing, and pompously artificial. But it is a change that may easily be carried too far. For until we habitually conduct our business, our courtship, our quarrels and so forth, in poetry, the poetic drama must continue to represent something different from real life. As compared with the genre drama it must still be in the grand style.

A recent fine example of this style is the performance of Otis Skinner in the *Honor of the Family*, a play of the humorously romantic kind. The whole value of the piece rests upon the humor of its romantic unreality; and the actor gave his part just the right touch of flamboyant picturesqueness.

On the other hand, the production of Percy Mackaye's *Sappho and Phaon*, apart from all question of its merit as a stage-play, was predoomed to failure by the lack of poetic quality

in the acting. Such heightening of effects as was attempted was of a melodramatic character, more suggestive of the exaggerated emotions of commonplace life. Neither the diction nor the movements and gestures had the melodic and rhythmic qualities.

As to the need of the melodic quality in the speaking of verse there can be no question. This does not mean that in poetic diction the speaking voice and the singing voice are to be confused. Even in Greek drama we are told by Aristotle that the distinction was maintained. But the melody of the verse, the tone variations of the vowel sounds, the varying character of the consonants, the sustained lilt, or rise and fall, or gathering surge of sound — all this must be rendered through the variations of pitch, inflection, volume, and by the shading. Further, through phrasing, or the breaking up of the sequence, not necessarily by punctuation, but through pauses, suggested by the meaning and melody of the words, as well as by variations of the *tempo*, the rhythmic quality of the verse is interpreted.

It may seem a little like stretching the sense of words to describe gesture and movement as

melodic. Yet any reader who can remember Mary Anderson's grace of action, when she came floating down through the wood, as Perdita in *A Winter's Tale*, will agree that it had the suggestion of a spring song. So, too, was there a beauty, as of music, in the poses of her Galatea; and to come down to later times, there was a similar musical suggestion in Miss Matthison's Everyman, and in Forbes Robertson's Hamlet, as there is also in Mlle. Genée's dancing. There is a quality in the action of body and limbs that arouses an abstract delight, not incomparable to the kind which melody excites.

The reason is that the action, as painters would say, has a beautiful "movement." Action to the painter simply implies the moving or stationary pose of a figure; the functional play of body and limb, demanded by the act in which it is engaged. But, while representing this with ease and naturalness, the painter, in his choice of the precise moment in the act that he will represent, strives for a distribution of the body and limbs that shall involve also a beauty of movement. That is to say, a continuous line or growth of feeling, moving through the whole

figure, and returning upon itself, so that a continuity of curving, wave-like motions flows upwards and downwards throughout the whole figure.

Similarly, in the finest kind of poetic or heroic acting, there is a great deal more than mere action, easy and natural. Every part of the action is so subtly related to every other part, that there is a continuous undulation of movement in every phase of it. This movement appears in the actual pose assumed; its feeling is continued in the pauses in which the pose is held, and is again perceived in the transition from immobility to moving into a new pose. It links every part of the active and passive action into a rhythmic unity.

Yes, "active and passive action," for in fine acting the body is as instinct with movement in those passive phases, when the actor is listening, as in the active moments of speaking. The ordinary actor or actress is not a good listener. Instead of appearing to take in every word of the speaker and to be affected by it, he or she is simply waiting for his or her turn to speak. They remain stockishly passive, until their cue arrives, when they immediately and abruptly

start off acting with what they call action. It is so they interpret Shakespeare's advice: "Suit the action to the word and the word to the action." For the most part they take it to mean: keep quiet when you are silent; but, when you speak, do something with your hands. Hence in an average performance there is no rhythm of action either in the individual or in the give and take of the dialogue; the whole effect is a jerky interchange of starts and stops.

But what did Shakespeare mean by his advice? Simply, one may suppose, that the pose or action must not be unnecessary, introduced for its own sake to display the actor's agility or grace, but that it must be related to the actual meaning of the words. This is a very elemental conception of the use of action, which the art of successive generations of fine acting has expanded. In this elementary sense, it is customary for the action to precede the word. The gesture indicates in a broad and general way the idea, which is definitely explained in the following words. Thus, for example, an actress stretches her arms in front of her with the palms uppermost. We conclude she has a petition or entreaty to express. The speech that follows

the action explains to us and to the actor whom she is addressing the nature of it. Her speech finished, the actor averts his head and stretches out his arm, as if to keep her at a distance. We know thereby that he declines her suit; we wait for his words to tell us why. Or he points to the door: and the following words, that she shall leave the room, are not necessary, though they may add to the emphasis of the dismissal. To the average dramatic student, the average actor or actress, and the greater part of their audience, this kind of thing is what is implied by action, and this only.

Well, let us admit that this use of action befits the heroic and romantic drama. It adds nothing to the meaning of the words, but it does broaden and heighten and give color to their impressiveness. It helps to fill out the big canvas which this form of drama demands; it is essential to the grand style, demanded by the theme. By the same token it may be out of place, as I hope to show, in genre drama.

But, pursuing our simile of the big canvas, let us insist that such action shall not only add weight to individual speeches, but that it shall have those qualities of movement and rhythmic

continuity that unite all parts of the stage picture into one, and make of it a grand composition, worthy of the theme. This may not have been intended by Shakespeare, but it has certainly become the aim of modern stage-management, when, as is not often, it knows its business. Especially, since the representation of the drama has become pictorial, the necessity of making the action a series of finely composed pictures has been understood. It is, however, too frequently overlooked. Acting now challenges comparison with pictures; it cannot help doing so. Yet how many stage managers, I wonder, have any knowledge of pictorial composition. They simply load their canvas, I mean the stage, with crowds of figures, and the audience, looking for nothing but sensational effect, applauds.

However, the point that we have reached in our discussion is that action is not merely concerned with the meaning of the words; it should also be interpretive. Of what? In the first place, certainly, of the individual character. Mary Anderson in her action interpreted the gay buoyant youth of Perdita. She was a symbol of the spring-time of life. But of more

than this, for her entrance marked that the winter of misunderstanding was past. It, in effect, was a prologue to the second part of the play in which all sorrow is to be finally forgotten in happiness. It interpreted the commencement of a new movement — an *allegretto*, following the *adagio*. Lastly, the movement and the rhythm of her action were physical interpretations of the poetry, pervading the whole drama, of the poetic conception of its theme, of the imagery with which it is wrought out, and of the music of the poet's verse.

There we have it. The actor is not a walking semaphore, or sign-post. His body should be an instrument, capable of infinite expression; and the purpose of his action should be to interpret, not only the shades of his own moods and thoughts, but also the melody and rhythm of the poetry of the whole piece. His action, therefore, while less formal and abstract than the Greeks, should still be symbolic of the spiritual intention of the play. Every phase of it should interpret the movement and rhythm of the poetry.

It was so that Wagner conceived of action, and it was so that he trained his actors at

Baireuth to become artists. One of the most perfect exponents of this ideal, as applied to opera, is Madame Ternina, whose every pose and gesture is a living, plastic interpretation of the music. But to this almost purely abstract interpretation the actor of non-musical poetic dramas must add an interpretation of the concrete meaning of the words. Yet while he interprets a definite thought or mood, his action must not be regulated solely by this; it should include sufficient abstract suggestion to interpret also the prevailing poetry of the whole drama. That is to say, it should be not only natural and characteristic, but to some extent formal and abstract-symbolic. If it is not, he drags the poetry down to merely embarrassed prose, and makes, what should be an ideally exalted theme, rub shoulders to its own disparagement with what is made to appear an impossibly exaggerated form of realism.

When we come to what I have called the genre drama, the picture of smaller canvas whose theme approximates to the characters and manners and situations of ordinary life, we again meet with the distinction between heightened color and color pitched to a natural key.

The heightened color may be due to an excess of humor, involving character and situations of various degrees of extravagance, reaching all the way to a romping farce. Or it may be due to the loading of the canvas with emotion, and to exaggerated contrasts of good and bad, to situations unusual and sensational. It is clear that in both cases the acting will properly partake of the immoderate suggestion. It should not be judged in reference to real life, but according to the particular degree of exaggerated realism at which the author has aimed. The form of the acting must correspond to the character of the material embodied, and we can only apply to it the general test — is the acting consistent with the spirit of the play? If a hero or heroine, passionately in love with each other, are hounded by a villain whose machinations drive them into a series of crises, threatening both their union and their lives, until at some supreme moment villainy is unmasked and virtue triumphs, we may demand that neither the hero nor the heroine shall be merely a sentimental gusher, that the one throughout shall be a man, the other truly womanly, and that their enemy shall not have utter wickedness too

obviously writ all over him. Yet, considering how much emotion and peril are compressed into a few short hours, we shall hesitate to say that the acting is overdone. We shall grant the plea of reasonable probability.

On the other hand, in the extravagance of humor the author leaves so wide a margin of play for the personal idiosyncrasy of the individual comedian, that any preconceived standard of probability is impossible. More than that, to attempt one would be to rob ourselves of the pleasure of appreciation. We hope that the acting will not pass beyond the bounds of decency, and may prefer its quality to be dry, unctuous, or subtle, rather than merely noisy or violent horse-play. That is a matter of our own idiosyncrasy. But, beyond this, we can lay down no standard of judgment We can but take each play as we find it, and then satisfy ourselves as to whether, granted this kind of a subject and treatment, the acting is conformable with the degree of probability or rather of improbability presumed by the author.

In fact, it is only when a drama, approximating real life, is founded on a reasonable motive and pretends to reach a conclusion by natural

and probable methods, that we find ourselves again on firm ground for the judging of acting. Here we can formulate some general principles, sound in themselves and valuable in their application. Firstly, for example, that, however realistic the motive, acting must retain its character of being an art. Secondly, that in approximating to nature the best acting is distinguished by economy of means; and, thirdly, that suggestion, rather than overt acts, represents the highest modern standard.

As to the first point: acting, for all its naturalness, must not be really natural; it must retain the conventions that art requires. And those conventions in the case of acting result from its being an art that appeals primarily to the senses of sound and sight. In real life, people visit one another and after preliminary greetings seat themselves. The call may last half an hour, during which is carried on a conversation that may be interesting, but is more or less desultory and probably leads to no other end than that of passing the time pleasantly. And all the while the group have remained seated, some of the party punctuating their remarks with a certain amount of gesture, while the others,

whether speaking or listening, sit still. But if a scene in a play represented nothing more than reality of this kind, we should be intolerably bored. It is true we may be bored with the real thing also; but that is another matter. We certainly must not be with the play. The latter, indeed, like all realistic art, must give us a heightened impression of actual life. The dialogue, instead of being desultory, must advance step by step to some definite end, in order to focus our attention. Meanwhile we have to listen to the voices. They too must heighten the impression of the conversation by varieties of diction — now soft, now loud, then quick or leisurely, and so on, giving the dialogue an effectiveness that in ordinary life might seem an affectation. But this is necessary on the stage, that the ear may be continually quickened to alertness and satisfied with the meaning and beauty of the sounds.

Similarly the eye needs satisfaction. It will weary of sameness; the figures must vary their positions; change their seats, occasionally walk the floor, or even conduct the conversation standing, not for the mere purpose of creating variety, but to heighten the point and pungency

of the dialogue. Further, the poses and groupings and movements must be regulated so as to produce a series of pictures, agreeable or expressive to the eye. And every one of these visible effects must be related to the audible ones; tuned to the sound and meaning of the dialogue, timed to the exact moment of its successive points of emphasis. Even the getting up or sitting down, the lifting of a book from the table, the very smallest detail, must be an artfully contrived accent to the progress of the scene. Nothing done for its own sake, or in the way of natural restlessness or vivacity, but tuned and regulated to a definite purpose.

Nor is this all. The finished art requires that the individual acting shall be regulated so as to promote the effectiveness of the ensemble. Just as in a fine picture the smallest detail is rhythmically related to the whole composition, so it should be in acting. A "star" surrounded by "sticks" will not do, nor a star exploiting himself or herself at the expense of the other characters. Between the greatest and the least there must be an interplay of team work.

In the best examples of ensemble acting this will always have a quality of rhythm. The

"movement," that we have spoken of in connection with the individual actor, will be communicated to all the people on the stage. And it will be a rhythm of movement that appeals not only to the eye but to the ear. I have never had any doubt of this, but was immensely strengthened in my conviction by witnessing the recent performances of the Russian players, headed by Madame Komisarzhevsky. I could not understand a word of the dialogue, though I was conversant with the general tenor of the scenes, in some cases quite familiar with the speeches as they would be in English. But on account of the strangeness of the unknown tongue one's ear was peculiarly quickened to the effects of sound and sight — to what, may be called, the abstract quality of the diction and the action.

It was delightful to hear how these accomplished artists, accustomed to tune their own individualities to the larger purpose of the whole effect, carried forward the effectiveness of one another. As a speaker finished, the cadence of his or her concluding words would set the pitch to which the following speaker set the opening words of his reply. Then, having attached the sound of his words to that of the

previous speaker's, he would play upon the resources of his own voice. But the effectiveness of the vocalization was increased by the suggestion that it had grown out of the spirit of the scene and was preserving its continuity.

Correspondingly, in what was visible to the eye there was a handing on of gesture, that was accepted and then modified to the speaker's own individuality and to the points of his speech. There was an unbroken chain of cause and effect of gesture. Instead of the stops and starts that distinguish the ordinary haphazard methods, in which every one does his separate stunt for all it is worth, or as much as the "star," craving for chief recognition, will permit, there was the rhythmic play of movement, both of sight and sound, that characterizes a fine pictorial or musical composition. The stage picture, indeed, was a composition in the artistic sense of the word, that all the details were duly related to one another and adjusted to a harmony of ensemble.

Coming to our second point — economy of means. The tendency of modern art, in painting and literature, as well as in the drama, is toward intimacy and conciseness of expression.

Character is exhaustively analyzed and synthetically expressed. In the case of each art the canvas is smaller, but the composition is infinitely more subtle and complex. Through the open wall of the proscenium arch we watch men and women, laying bare to one another their very souls. Human life, instead of being treated in large and general terms, is focused down to a point of burning intensity; it is the inner life, rather than its externals, that forms the motive of the modern drama. The whole tendency of the picture is toward intimacy, intensity, and synthesis of expression.

Recognizing this, the best actors and actresses of modern serious drama regard gesture as a thing to be avoided rather than sought after; to be used sparingly, and not for the purpose of display, but of fastening the attention on some vital point. The reason is simple. The conflict on which they wish to fasten our gaze is a mental one; it is within them; and they can best help us to realize it by not distracting our attention to the outsides of their persons, but by riveting it on the inside workings of the mind. In Duse's greatest moments her body is immobile; no external movement disturbs the eye;

but within there is an intensity of mental action that attracts us as a magnet draws a needle. Nor is facial play essential to this magnetic power; we can feel it when her back is turned to us. It is indeed a magnetism that informs the whole body. Such action as is employed is apt, in the language of Delsarte, to be rather concentric than eccentric; such, that is to say, as tends to draw in upon itself rather than to spread outward. Instead of the broad, sweeping, extending gestures of romantic and heroic drama, the action will be concentrated; the actor, for example, to carry home his point, resting his hand upon the table and tapping it with his fingers, while his eye is fixed on the face of his companion and the latter's upon him. For one of the effects of this compressed style of acting is that the people on the stage seem absolutely wrapt up in what they are doing. They do not appear conscious of an audience. If they look in our direction, it is with an abstracted or long-distance vision that passes far beyond us. They are alone with themselves, surprised by us in the intimacy of their thoughts, words, and acts. This seems to be one of the tests of good acting in modern serious drama.

As to the third point, namely, that modern acting relies upon suggestion. It follows from what we have been saying. Since the conflict of the modern drama is so preëminently a mental one, and the impression sought to be created is one that will affect the mind, the principle of suiting the action to the *word* has been replaced by that of elucidating the *thought* by suggestion. The latter may be conveyed by action, or by inaction; it may be a simple gesture or a series, constituting "business." Whatever it is, its significance will be apt to depend upon indirect allusion. Thus, in *The Doll's House*, as Krogstadt gradually makes Nora realize that he has her in his power, Mme. Nazimova stood at the table sorting a bunch of carnations into threes, which she tied with string. At first, she is a little restless under the man's intrusion; otherwise still the happy child. But, as she holds the last three flowers, the truth dawns upon her; she stops in her tying, the flowers drop one by one from her fingers. The "business" in itself may seem ordinary and of no particular significance; but, seen in relation to the thought that has gradually penetrated her mind, it has the significance of a symbol. The

continuity of her happiness is interrupted; the last moments of the doll-life lie scattered.

This is an example of the kind of action that interprets. It is no longer directly suited to the *word*, it is an illumination, by indirect suggestion, of the *thought*. It is in its modern realistic way as truly symbolic as the more formal abstract action of the Greeks. And I venture to say that it is the kind of action that modern serious drama demands. It presupposes actors who have minds and can think, interpreting their dramas of thought to thinking audiences.

PART II

CHAPTER V

THE PLAY

IN the previous chapters, dealing with the audience, the stage, and the actor, we have discussed some of the general conditions that affect the material, the treatment, and the representation of the drama. We have now to consider the playwright's part in the matter — the play itself.

The latter is affected by the three conditions we have already considered: namely, the audience, the stage, and the actors. It is occupied with material in the choice of which the playwright is influenced by his audience, or rather by the aggregate of audiences. For he not only draws his material from his study and observation of human nature, but he is also dependent upon the audience for the acceptance of his play and for the opportunity of its being represented. Further, in his treatment of the material, he is necessarily influenced by the circumstances that

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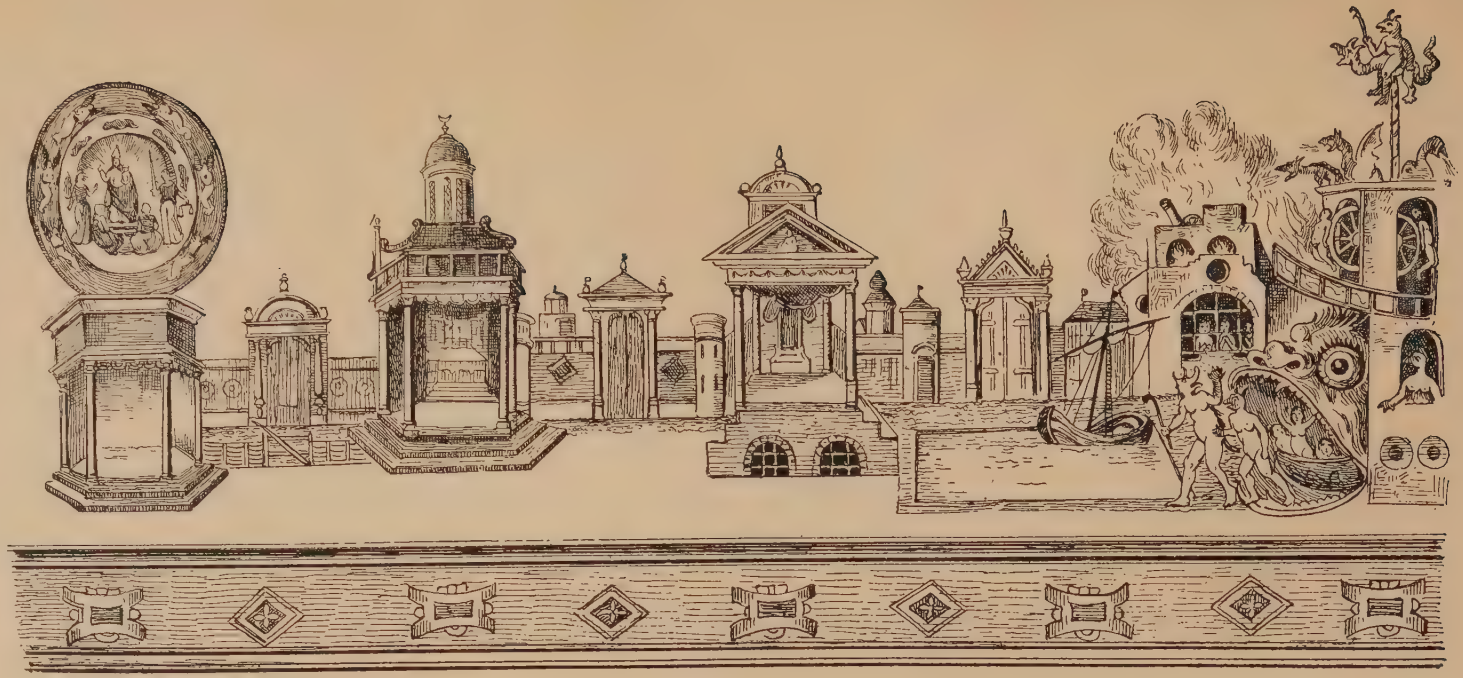


MYSTERY STAGE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

(See page 37.)

will govern its representation — the actual character of the stage of his day, with its particular possibilities and limitations of scenery and equipment. Lastly, for its representation, the crowning act of fertilization that makes his work a living drama — he must depend upon the actors. They have it in their power to obscure the merits of a good play, and, temporarily, at least, to give suggestion of vitality to a bad one.

On the other hand, though the playwright everywhere and always has adapted himself to these conditions, as he found them, the men of original mind have refused to be subservient to the restraint. They have used the conditions but as a *pied à terre* from which to advance to some fresh form of vitality, and in doing so have carried with them to a higher point of development the conditions themselves. They have aroused in their audience a new capacity of appreciation, widened or made more flexible the conventions of the stage, and heightened the possibilities of acting. It is, in fact, the playwright who is the originator, the fertilizer, and the leader in dramatic progress; and the history of the drama is really a history of those

whom posterity has recognized as the foremost dramatists.

This being the case, the intelligent student of the drama will do well to avoid any tendency to fix rigidly his attitude of mind as to what a play should or should not involve. It is true, he must to some extent acquaint himself with the technique of play-writing, just as a student of pictures needs to have a general idea of the principles that underlie the technique of painting. But the student of painting discovers that these principles are various and often contradictory. He learns, therefore, while taking note of all, to regard none of them as final or infallible; that, on the contrary, one painter achieves merit through one set of principles, another through another. Thus he brings a separate clearness of vision to the study of each man's work; and, recognizing the technical motive and method that it involves, judges it only in relation to the work of other men, pursuing similar ends by similar means. His general knowledge of the principles involved gives him a standard of appeciation in each particular case. But he is ready at any moment to face the work of some one that, starting with

a given principle of technique, has deviated somewhat from it or developed it further.

Similarly, the student of the drama will study the technique of the art, not to discover how a play *must* be written, but how at various times and by various men plays have been written. He will store up in his mind a budget of principles which may serve as a standard by which to judge of plays, but which from time to time may be modified or added to. For he recognizes that, as long as the drama continues to be a living art, it must change in response to the changing needs and conditions of the human life that it embodies.

I have used the word "art," which should need no justification. Yet there are many to whom the idea that drama is an art has never occurred. They have regarded the stage solely as a form of light amusement, and for them the drama in the strict sense of the term does not exist. All that they demand is a stringing together of comical and attractive features, — a medley of sights and sounds that can begin anywhere, move on briskly in any direction whatever, and finish only when the ingenuity of the concocter, the purse of the promoter,

and the patience of the audience have been exhausted. Such a conviction, in fact, lacks the very essentials that a play, like every other work of art, must possess — a clear motive developed to an appropriate conclusion. For the essence of a work of art is that it presents a single, self-sufficient, self-explanatory whole; a composition, characterized by unity of purpose and expression; that is to say, a unity, built up of harmoniously related parts. It is from this point of view that we purpose to study the technique of the drama.

Drama, so considered, is akin to the other fine arts. It shares with all the element of composition and, like each of them, has its own particular possibilities and limitations. We have already spoken of its relation to plastic and to pictorial art: how it presents a series of moving statues or pictures; and have noted that in its regard for the rhythm of sight and sound it approximates to the art of music. But all this had reference to the manner of its representation. What we are now considering is the antecedent work of the playwright in the actual construction of his play; and the play itself, in its character as a composed work

of art, has most in common with architecture.

The latter is based upon a plan. It is true, the average layman is apt to overlook this fact. He judges a building solely by the appearance of its façades. The architect, however, begins by designing his plan, which is governed, firstly, by the conditions of the ground space available, and, secondly, by the purpose for which the building is intended. It is only when he has thoroughly studied these points in relation to each other, and has considered how he can best adjust the purpose of the building to the ground it is to occupy, and develop its practical usefulness under those conditions through each successive floor of the structure, that he begins to busy himself with the question of external appearance. His first concern is to make the internal structure completely practicable for the purpose in view; in other words, to secure for it an organic unity. Then he encloses this essential composition in an exterior that, if he is an artist, will have an organic relation to this unity. Thus, briefly, to take the case of the Capitol at Washington, the end pavilions, with their separate flights of steps, proclaim

from outside their internal provision for, respectively, the Senate and the House of Representatives, while the center structure emphasizes its purpose of a noble ceremonial entrance. It is crowned with a dome that forms the culminating feature in the symmetry of the external mass. For in the embellishment of the exterior also there is an organic unity, corresponding to that of the internal structure. Both inside and out the edifice presents a composition of harmoniously related parts.

The analogy between such an architectural harmony and that involved in play-building is eminently suggestive. The site for which the author plans his play is the stage. It has differed, as we have seen, at various periods, and according to its variations has effected the design of the dramatist's plan, in regard to both the kind of thing he shall represent and the manner of its representation. Under existing arrangements it has suggested and made possible the division of the play into a variety of acts and scenes. In accordance with these opportunities, and, moreover, in avoidance of everything that cannot appropriately be represented on such a fixed site, the author proceeds

to develop the purpose of his play. This is the motive of his plot, which he lays out to fit his ground plan of scenes, and then builds up story by story; that is to say, by situation following situation, evolving scene by scene the structure of his plot, until it culminates in a climax. Hitherto he has been building up; but now the process is rather one of building down, so that the latter part of his play may symmetrically balance the beginning. Once more let us recall the Capitol at Washington in order to picture to our eye the dramatist's composition. The central feature with its dome represents the climax. On our left, as we face the building, the structure leads up to the climax, and on the right it leads down, so that with our finger in the air we can trace the general effect by two curves; one ascending, the other descending.

Now in studying the Capitol we may see it as composed either of three or of five main parts. In each case there is the culminating center. But, for the rest, we may either regard everything to the left of the dome as one part and, consequently, everything to the right as another part, making in all three parts, or we may note that each of the subsidiary parts is really made

up of two sections — the end pavilion and the connecting wing or "curtain." In other words, picturing the Capitol as typical of a play, we may describe it as a composition in three or five acts, reaching its climax in the middle act. Leading up to the Climax, if we continue the phraseology of the drama, are the Introduction and the Development, while following it are the Denouement or gradual untying of the knot and the Catastrophe or Conclusion.

Whether the Introduction and the Development are compressed into one act or separated into two, and the Denouement and Conclusion similarly compressed or expanded, is purely at the discretion of the dramatist. Indeed, he may, if he sees fit, confine his entire planning to one act, as he will most probably do, if his design presupposes a small structure; that is to say, a short play. In fact, the question of the number of acts is purely his affair; and one, in itself, of no intrinsic importance to the character of his play. If he plans his plot so that some of the action takes place in one place and the rest elsewhere, he will naturally avail himself of the division into acts. If, however, he confines the action to one scene, he may still

plan that intervals of time shall separate the various incidents, and accordingly will drop the curtain here and there to mark the intervals. On the other hand, he may, as Bernard Shaw in *Getting Married*, and Charles Rann Kennedy in *The Servant in the House*, have recently done, conceive of his play as a single continuing episode, involving no change of scene and no interruption of time; in which case he will regard the division into acts as purely arbitrary; and may be disposed to quote Mr. Shaw's admonition, that "the audience is respectfully requested to regard these interruptions as intended for its convenience, and not as part of the author's design."

These two dramatists, in thus confining the above-mentioned plays to a single scene, represented continuously, have reverted to the old conventions of the unities of time and place; so that it is convenient to take this opportunity of discussing them. They form two out of the three unities that have been prescribed as essential to dramatic composition — unity of time, unity of place, and unity of treatment. The authority for them was derived from Aristotle's fragmentary work on "Poetics." Scholars for

a long time assumed that they were based upon the example of the great Athenian dramatists; and in consequence the French dramatists, Corneille and Racine, planned the structure of their classic dramas to conform to them. Subsequent criticism, however, beginning with that of Lessing, has demonstrated that even the Athenians did not limit their freedom of design by a strict observance of such restrictions. Meanwhile, Shakespeare, though probably he had heard of them, repudiated them, and English dramatists have followed his example, while in France the Romantic movement, headed by Victor Hugo, eventually disposed of them. Or rather, one should say, of the necessity of observing the unities of time and place, for the unity of treatment is still enforced.

The object of all three was to increase the sense of illusion, by simplifying the impression which the audience was required to accept. The Athenian stage, as we have seen, presented no illusion of place. During the several performances of one day, it might successively stand for Athens, Thebes, Mycenæ, or what the author wished. "Where are we now, my dear Antigone?" are the opening words of the

tragedy of Œdipus Coloneus; and to her father's question, repeated a little further on, she replies: "As I have learned from passing travelers, not far from Athens." To this general information is added a few moments later the particular fact. An Athenian tells the wanderers that it is a grove at the entrance to the Temple of the Furies. Thus the audience is made aware of the locality; and, as there is no change in the scene, there is nothing to interfere with the impression aroused in their imaginations. Similarly, since the play was presented by daylight in continuous view of the audience, it added much to the ease with which they could comprehend it, that there should be no change suggested from day to night, nor any interruption in the sequence of the time. In fact, so far as the unities of time and place were observed by the Athenians, it was a reasonable concession to the limitations which the character of their stage involved. The dramatists planned their play structure in logical relation to the necessities and conditions of the site. By the time, however, that the French dramatists adopted these unities of time and place, the conditions of the stage had changed and no such necessity

existed. What had been to the Athenians a convenience, they hardened into a convention; and from a reasonable restraint evolved a rigid dogma. Under the spell of it they erected some noble dramatic edifices; but the principle involved was too narrowly restricting to permit an expansion of their art, so as to represent adequately the volume and variety of life.

For life, whether of the individual or of humanity, is a matter of growth, needing time for its development, while change of time may bring in its train a change of scene. It takes four seasons to complete a year, and there are many seasons in the physical and mental life of an individual. How shall this development from one to another be always capable of presentation in a single day? Shakespeare realized this. The fecundity of his imagination created plots for the unfolding of which time and change of scene were necessary, as they were, too, for the development of the interplays of passion in which he involved his characters. Consequently, though his stage was as limited in opportunity as the Athenian, he refused to be bound by its restrictions. From the smaller illusion of logic he appealed to the larger one

that he depended upon his own creative power to induce in the imagination of his audience. And even to-day, though our imagination has been dulled by the facilities which the modern stage affords for elaborate and frequent changes of painted scene-illusions, we can follow one of his plays without aid of scenery and yield to the magic of his own suggestion. When, for example, the Banished Duke opens the Forest scene in "*As You Like It*": —

> "Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
> Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
> Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
> More free from peril than the envious court?"

poor indeed must be the imagination of the spectator, if he need any painted pomp of lathe and canvas to suggest the change of scene from the artificialities and intrigues of the court to the free, frank, open life of the forest.

But, if Shakespeare were alive to-day, is it reasonable to suppose that he would not make use of every advantage that the modern stage presents? He who drew so eagerly from any source of inspiration, near or far, would surely not reject the opportunities that would now be

lying ready to his hand. Changes of Scenery would be made to mark the changes of the Scene.

So far then as these two unities are concerned, though dramatists may still resort to them, they have no validity as principles. Of the third one, the unity of treatment, we shall have much to say indirectly. For it simply implies that a harmony must prevail throughout the composition of the play; that the whole structure and its several parts should be harmoniously related, which is practically the subject of the remaining chapters.

Having thus accounted for the "unities," let us return to the divisions of the play. The division into acts and scenes, we have noted, is not essential. It may or may not form part of the author's design. And here it may be well to remind the reader that the word scene is used somewhat differently by French playwrights. With them, as with us, it signifies a subdivision of the act; but with the French this does not involve a change of place.

Following the example of the Italian comedies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they make the scene denote the appearance on the

stage of another personage. Each fresh entrance, except of servants or supernumeraries, marks the beginning of a new scene, which continues until the arrival of some other character or until the fall of the curtain. It is an exceedingly practical arrangement for the actor and stage-manager. The former at once knows his whereabouts in the play; while during the process of rehearsal it offers a series of sign-posts, by which the various stages of the plot can be immediately referred to or identified. Moreover, since the entrance of each character enacts, as it were, the laying of another course of masonry in the building up of the play, this division into scenes is an assistance to our comprehension as we read it. We mark more readily the successive evolutions of the plot.

It may be added that the use of scenes, in our sense of the word to represent a change of place, has been curtailed on the modern stage. The old type of comedy, represented, for example, by Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, demanded the frequent lowering of a front-cloth, painted to suggest a corridor, one side of a room, a street, a wood, or what not. It was dropped so far down the stage that only a strip

of the latter intervened between it and the footlights; and here the actors, few in number, for such scenes were only subsidiary ones, strung themselves out in line. They were so near the footlights that the make-up on their faces was unduly prominent; so close to the cloth that the perspective of the latter was ridiculously distorted. Hence in every way the illusion of reality was impossible. It was in fact a mere convention, tolerated by the audience, and adopted as a convenience alike by the author and the stage-manager, because it enabled the former at small expense to multiply his scenes, while it often assisted the latter in his management of the scenery. For, while the front scene was in progress, the cloth served as a screen behind which the carpenters could be setting the stage for the next act. Hence, as often as not, the actors in front would go through their parts to a rear accompaniment of hammering, shoving, and vociferations, while the street or corridor at their backs swayed in the wind which these proceedings aroused. Not only was illusion, as I have said, banished, but the scene was often made ridiculous or, at best, run through under circumstances that, from a

modern standpoint, lessened its significance. And yet it is under conditions of this sort that two of the sprightliest scenes in *School for Scandal* are enacted, — the two quarrel scenes between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle.

Even to-day we accept these as we find them, because their method of representation is an inseparable part of the conventional character of the whole comedy. The latter is a *jeu d'esprit* that we do not think of subjecting to the test of realistic illusion. Just as we enjoy the polished conversation that flows indiscriminately from the lips of all the characters, no matter who they are or what their station in life, so we ignore the lack of *vraisemblance* in the stage settings. We yield ourselves agreeably to the conventionality of the whole thing. But in regard to a modern play we have become more critical.

The fact is that the modern mind has become addicted to realism. There may be a reaction in the air — some of us believe there is — nevertheless up to the present in the drama, as in fiction and painting, the test of appreciation is truth to nature. We profess to judge of an actor or actress by the degree to which he or

she portrays life, though with nine people out of ten it is probably some idiosyncrasy in the personality of the man or woman that attracts. Yet we fancy we like them because "they are so natural," and demand a corresponding naturalness in the scene that surrounds them. We are no longer satisfied to see a forest descend in the midst of a drawing-room, and to have the actors stroll into it by way of the painted curtains that adorn the proscenium wings. Nor will we accept for a forest the obviously-painted cloth. We demand the illusion that space and distance and the accompaniment of side vistas as well as backgrounds will produce. In a word, there must be nothing to interfere with our readiness to accept the whole thing as real. Some people, as I have already hinted in a previous chapter, are too easily persuaded; but that only goes to show how eager they are for the illusion of reality.

Recognizing this, managers have found their interest in catering to it. The simpler the scenery, the more easily is it worked in the theater and transplanted from city to city, when on tour. Thus the saving, effected in the abolition of subsidiary scenes, can be applied

to the enhancement of the effect of the one or more set-pieces. And in this reform the scene painter naturally co-operates gladly. Instead of expending much time and skill on what will never be seen to advantage, he can now concentrate his efforts with a better possibility of really artistic results.

It is, no doubt, true that for a long time we have accepted and enjoyed the brilliant phantasmagoria of changing scenes with which Sardou envelopes his plots. But, though he is a master of theatric display and avails himself to the full of every device of ingenious stage carpentry and management to suggest illusion, the taste for such lavish expenditure of money and mechanism has not grown upon us. It may still survive in the case of the popular melodrama, in which, since the object is to stir the feelings of the audience to the highest pitch of unreasoning emotion, resort is had to all kinds of shocks and surprises, no matter how incongruous. But with audiences of average discrimination, I repeat, both the need and the taste for this multiplication of effects is falling into abeyance.

With the tendency to realism the playwright

has kept pace. In a measure he has led it. For, originating with the French dramatist, Scribe, whose method was founded on that of Molière, the system of play-building has become simplified. The structure no longer straggles over a quantity of ground. It occupies a more limited space, and is built up story by story, or act by act, with a closer interrelationship of parts, and a more pronounced compactness of the whole. Its main tendency is toward concentration. Whether this shall involve a single act or more, and, if the latter, how many, is, as we have noted, purely in the discretion of the author. It does not affect the principle of his design. On the other hand, whatever the number of his acts, their internal mechanism will involve the fivefold division to which we have already alluded. These, we recall, are: 1. Introduction; 2. Development; 3. Climax; 4. Denouement or untying of the knot; and 5. Catastrophe or Conclusion. It is these that have to be considered. But, possibly, before doing so, it will be well to discuss the material which is at the service of the dramatist. Then, having noted this, we will proceed to examine his treatment of it.

CHAPTER VI

THE MATERIAL OF THE DRAMA

BEFORE we proceed to a study of the dramatist's technique, let us inquire into the material that supplies him with his theme. At the same time it should be clearly understood that this separation of theme from technique, of material from treatment, is unscientific, inartistic, and only to be justified by the convenience of study. For in a true work of art the theme embodied and the technique which embodies it are inextricably interwoven, as warp and woof. We may unravel them for the purpose of examining each; but in doing so are losing sight for the time being of what the artist created, namely, the union of the two. It is by this composite result that he may fairly claim to be judged, and not by a separate examination of either the one or the other of these ingredients.

It is in this respect that French criticism is superior to the average run of Anglo-Saxon.

We are apt immediately to fasten our attention upon the subject of the picture, or the story of the play, and often so exclusively that we condemn or applaud the work of art without any subsequent reference to the manner in which the theme is represented. Not because we are more intellectual than the French, but because it is our habit to narrow our horizon to intellectual considerations and to make them the sole test of appreciation. We ignore the artistic.

Our proneness to do so is a heritage from Puritan ancestors who shattered the colored glory of cathedral windows, broke up the organs, knocked off what they could reach of sculptured ornament and tracery, and daubed the interior of places of worship with whitewash and plaster. They would worship solely, as they expressed it, in spirit and in truth; which in the working out resulted in their narrowing the mystery of God and the miracles of his world to the chop-logic of what they complacently called reasoning, and in ignoring the truth of their own natures and of nature all about them; nature's inherent beauty, and human nature's complex mechanism of manifold sensations. Beauty was to them a snare, and consequently its various

Old Inn showing Courtyard in which Plays were Performed

manifestations, in art, abomination. To feel the joy of life was dangerous, to indulge in it a sin; and men and women tried to regulate their lives as though the sensibilities and emotions with which their bodies and minds abounded were a disgrace and shame. No wonder that they distrusted art, which in its various forms is the highest product and expression of man's capacity for sensation.

Even to-day this distrust has not entirely disappeared. Art in some quarters is still regarded as a weakness, or tolerated only as a necessary concession to certain unpractical weaklings. And, by the greater number of those who persuade themselves that they respect it, it is still misunderstood. As I have said before, and make no apology for repeating, they look upon it solely as a vehicle for intellectual, moral, or religious ideas; that it may and should possess a power of independent appeal to our emotions is overlooked. It is as if they saw in the glory of a crimson sunset only the promise of a fine day to-morrow for their farming operations; no present source of physical and spiritual enjoyment.

Yet, while I hope in the next chapter to

arouse an interest in the technique of the drama, and to pave the way to a habit of expecting the technique and the theme to be mutually reinforcing, we must not overlook the importance of the latter. And it is this which we are now to consider.

The Theme or the material from which the dramatist builds his play is dug from the quarry of human life. In comparison with the immensity of the source upon which he draws, he takes but a few blocks. He introduces them to us at the beginning of the play. Their edges and angles are irregular, they present contradictory surfaces; only judicious shaping or the use of intervening cement will make them adhere to one another; it is only by calculation and adjustment that they can be assembled into a complete structure that rounds out conclusively the purpose with which the architect-dramatist started.

But enough of metaphor; for the blocks are human beings, separated from the confusion of their ordinary surroundings and assembled on a tiny microcosm of the world's stage. They have been brought together by the arbitrary will of the dramatist to accomplish or demonstrate

some phase of life that he has in mind. When the conclusion is reached, it will represent in epitomized completeness the logical result of persons, such as these, being drawn together in circumstances or situations such as the author has devised. But meanwhile the persons, having distinct individualities, will not immediately, perhaps will never, coalesce; they will act and react upon one another, producing oppositions that time and circumstances may either reconcile or confirm. This conflict may result mainly from essential differences of character and temperament, or mainly from the circumstances in which the personages are involved; it may assume a comical or serious aspect; and in the latter case may be cleared up happily or finish in disaster. It is the witnessing of this conflict that arouses the interest of the audience; the suspense as to the issue that holds it fast, the character of the issue that satisfies or disappoints it. Conflict, in fact, of some kind is an essential of dramatic action.

Nor in the progress of the conflict must the audience be allowed to detect the working of the dramatist. His personages must not seem like puppets, jigged to action by wires; they

must impress us as live realities, acting and reacting on one another, working out by themselves the issue of the conflict. It may be that their actions are overshadowed by some influence stronger than themselves; as by Fate, for example, in the ancient tragedies; or by the destiny of war, as in some modern drama of our struggle for Independence. But the overruling power must be clearly something projected on to the back of the drama itself; it must be inherent in the situations visibly and mentally presented; it must not be due to any outside devices of the author. Otherwise, we shall regard it as theatric, not dramatic; not an intrinsic element in the doing of the action, but a trick adopted by the author arbitrarily.

Such was the *deus ex machina*, the god from the machine, frequently introduced by Euripides. When the various threads of his plot had reached such a moil that there was no human means of disentangling them, the god, slung up by a sort of crane, would appear above the proscenium, and through his simple say-so effect a solution of the problem. Similarly in many of the Miracle plays, when the author had brought his personages to a pass from which

they could not extricate themselves, he would introduce the Virgin Mary to effect a happy ending out of all their afflictions. The practice of Euripides was caricatured by Aristophanes, and the very term *deus ex machina* has continued to our own day to signify a device, not arising naturally out of the given circumstances, but dragged in arbitrarily from outside.

The drama, then, the action exhibited in the doing, must involve a conflict. Tradition and practice are agreed on this point. Without a conflict the action is not dramatic. The clash that the conflict presents may be one of innumerable varieties. It may be between the individual and Fate, as in the case of Œdipus, who sinned unwittingly against natural and moral law; or between the individual and circumstances, as in the case of Romeo and Juliet, victims of a family feud; or of a man, pitied against his own nature as well as circumstances, as was Hamlet. Or the conflict may be one of individual wills: witness Benedick and Beatrice, or Katharine and Petruchio; or a clash of principles as between autocracy and democracy in *Julius Cæsar*, or as between Nora's and her husband's conflicting views of marriage in

A Doll's House. It may be a clash of wits, as in *The Ladies' Battle;* tragic in its consequences as in *King Lear,* or a stir-about of fun as in the incongruous situations of the latest farcical comedy. These are but more or less suggestive examples of the thousand and one forms that the conflict may assume.

It goes without saying that the nature of the conflict and the way in which it is developed should be main considerations in estimating the merit of a play. The good play is distinguished, as well by the vital significance of the conflict involved, as by the consistency and inevitableness that mark its progress. By way of illustration, let me cite the case of a play that in my opinion started out with the promise of a conflict of wide significance, which, however, was not fulfilled. Instead of adhering consistently to his original problem, the author permitted it to dwindle into a different one of narrower interest. This was *Paid in Full,* a comedy by Eugene Walter. The first act introduces us to a young married couple in a small city apartment. The husband is sweeping the carpet; the wife, washing the dishes. He is discontented, because he feels that his faithful

services, as collector for a shipping firm, are not properly recognized by his employers. His salary is small, and he cannot give his wife the same advantages that she enjoyed before marriage. Now here one scented the suggestion of two possible conflicts, both of sociological importance. The one that seemed uppermost was rebellion against the uneven distribution of profits. If so, it was an echo of that spirit of unrest over economic conditions that is stirring far and wide in the community. It involved a clash between Capital and Labor that was timely and vital. On the other hand, though not so evidently, the conflict might be one between Necessity and Desire; the problem that so many young married people have to face of being compelled to forego the pleasures they were able to enjoy in their single state; how to convert the loss into a gain and eventually win out to a position of greater economic freedom. This, also, would have been a conflict of wide and stirring interest. But of both of these the author loosened his hold before the act was finished. Just before the fall of the curtain he makes his hero embezzle. Instantly a new problem is created. It is no longer a

conflict on broad issues and general principles; it is narrowed down to one of personal dishonesty, arrayed against inevitable detection and disgrace. Our sympathies are immediately withdrawn from the young man; and the author, recognizing this, sets to work to ensure our utter detestation of him. He is shown to be an arrant cur, whose rapid descent into baseness is squalidly ignoble. Meanwhile the author has devised for us a big, particular shock. The president of the company is an old sea-captain, supposed to be brutalized by contact with savages and to be unscrupulously amorous. To this ogre the cur-husband proposes to sacrifice his wife's honor in order to save his own wretched carcase from the penitentiary. She, actuated by motives not explained, accepts the insult and repairs to the ogre's den. Here is the shock; followed, however, by a surprise, for the ogre turns out to be a bluff but kindly old gentleman, who respects her misery, and for her sake gives the husband a receipt for the money stolen and his dismissal. The cur, relieved from apprehension, makes overtures of affection to his wife. Rejecting them with loathing, she very properly leaves him. Pre-

sumably it is she who has "paid in full." But there was nothing in the first act, nor for that matter in the second, to suggest that the conflict was to be waged around the wife's sacrifice for her husband. This was an after-growth, for which no seed had been sown in the early part of the play. Yet the episode which it involved between the wife and the sea-captain was so strongly conceived and represented, that it aroused the interest of the audience and assured a run for the play. The latter, indeed, demonstrated that the author has exceptional dramatic ability, but at the same time that he has a great deal to learn regarding the technique of play-building. His play resembled a house that has resulted from gradual additions, adapted to the changing conditions of the family. It was not the product of a clearly conceived design, consistently adhered to.

Having noted that the material which the dramatist employs must involve a conflict, it remains to study some other questions, affecting its solution. In order to appeal successfully to the interest and sympathy of his audience, the dramatist must choose material that directly or indirectly touches ordinary human experi-

ence. Nor does this imply undue restrictions. His personages may be of a race or condition foreign to those of the audience; they may be demi-gods, or kings, or heroes; they may belong to other countries or a bygone age; they may even be creatures of the imagination; and the conflict in which they are involved may embrace passions or circumstances far removed from the ordinary lot of humanity. Nevertheless, in the final analysis of their motives and conduct and of the end to which they come, we should be able to apply the test of common human experience. In witnessing, for example, the tragedy of *Othello*, some of the audience may follow the action of the piece with a keen sense of its personal reference to their own experience. They have been the victims of a similar passion of jealousy, warranted or unwarranted; and every phase of the conflict they will tick off on the tablet of their own memory, and according to the quality of their temperament and its capacity for suspicion or confidence, revenge or forgiveness, will condemn or condone the hero.

The majority, however, will view the conflict in an impersonal way and test the motives,

conduct, and conclusion by a general reference to their experience. While there is no question of imagining themselves in Othello's case and of estimating his behavior by what they would themselves do, if similarly placed, they should be made to realize that, given a man of Othello's pride and sense of duty, and taking into consideration his racial heat of blood, the temper of his times, and the nature of the deceit practised upon him by Iago, his yielding to suspicion was probable and his act of revenge to be expected. If he is to have our sympathy and pity and not only to be condemned, we should be satisfied that his fight against suspicion was sufficient to clear him of a weakness of character. On the other hand, if at any point in the conflict we are not convinced of the reasonableness of his conduct, as judged upon general principles of experience in relation to his particular case, then, at least as far as we are concerned, there is a flaw in the logic of the drama. The probabilities have been outraged and for us the play is not satisfyingly dramatic; for the author has invented situations or conclusions that, while they may be effective theatrically, are dramatically unsound, because opposed to the experience of life.

We should recognize, however, that what we take to be an inconsistency with truth to life may really involve a truth that hitherto had escaped us. It may represent a phase of life which we have never looked closely in the face or thought out to a clear conclusion. Especially in these days, when the material of the drama has become more particularized, and plots have become simpler, but the interplay of motive and conduct more subtly analyzed, we should beware of hasty criticism. In ordinary life we are apt to be governed by tradition and habit and to act on impulse; seldom do we reason out our conduct in advance; and, even when we do, are liable to be biassed by social conventions and our individual temperament. But the latter may be an untrustworthy guide and the former may have outlived their usefulness. A new play may arrive which throws down a challenge to both.

It was so that Ibsen's *A Doll's House* startled the world. It questioned the sanctity of the convention — or as some would call it the supreme law — that marriage sanctifies even an unnatural and an unworthy alliance; and it raised a new question of individualism: has not

a woman the right, is it not her duty, to develop her mental and spiritual *ego* to its highest capacity? Very naturally it shocked the feelings of people — and they were the vast majority — who were accustomed to accept the convention as an unquestionable rule of conduct, and still, consciously or unconsciously, to regard a wife in the old light of being a part of her husband's goods and chattels. Nora, it is true, had been treated as a doll, first by her father, later by her husband. Even when she had become the mother of his children, the husband looked upon her as his plaything, doing naught to help her to a realization of her womanhood. When she was rudely awakened to it by the shock that unwittingly she had put herself within the grasp of the law, and this fact was discovered by her husband, his solicitude was not for her, but over the impending disgrace to himself. When, moreover, the shadow of this had been removed, still his thought was not of her mental and spiritual welfare but of his own physical pleasure. Was it therefore surprising that Nora, in her newly aroused sense of womanhood and in her hunger to develop it, should realize that her husband

could not help her; that in the absence of any spiritual bond between them their merely physical association was unnatural and unholy; that, in a word, she must not continue to live with a "strange man," but must get away by herself and work out in her own strength this new problem of her womanhood? She had children — yes; but her husband had told her that one who had acted as he subsequently found she had, was unfit to bring up children. He, however, had forgotten or was ready to ignore his own words. She could do neither; so she left his house.

It was this leaving home that outraged the public. It was so deliberate a violation of the conventions of marriage; so revolutionary a suggestion that marriage under certain circumstances was a form of sex-slavery, from which, out of reverence for her body, as well as for the needs of her mental and spiritual development, a woman was justified in freeing herself. Whatever may be your opinion to-day and mine on this question, we must remember that over twenty years have elapsed since the appearance of this play and much has happened in the meantime to affect our judgment. The point

to try and face is: what would have been your attitude of mind, if you had been present, as I was, at one of the earliest performances of what was then a new play?

It would, or should, have raised two important questions; a particular, and a general one. In the first place, has the author made out his own case; secondly, is his conclusion on so vital a matter one that commends itself to our moral judgment? We regard the first question from the point of view of the play itself; the second from that of the community. Firstly, then, if we grant for the sake of argument the author's contention that under such and such circumstances a separation, either temporary or permanent, is justifiable, has he represented the circumstances as logically leading to the conclusion? And again, is Nora, as he represents her, the kind of person who under these given conditions would be likely to have acted as she has been made to do? Does the introduction of the play present in her character sufficient indications of the possibility of so radical a change of heart and mind? Are the situations which conduce to it such as might reasonably produce the change in so short a

time? Would a "squirrel," like Nora, change so decisively, that a step, as resolute and self-asserting as the final one, might be probable, or at least possible?

To have raised these and similar questions regarding the inherent probabilities of the play would have been to adopt the attitude, to which every serious play is entitled, of being first of all judged on its own merits as a representation of human life. Judged by its own standpoint of intention, is the play self-sufficient? The same inquiry is in order to-day; and people, quite apart from ethical considerations, will have their own opinions as to whether or not the logic of this particular play is sound.

This being settled, either pro or con, the further question arises: is the conclusion in accordance with or opposed to our sense of morality? I know that some people will object to thus raising the issue of morality. They will argue that, since we set out to examine the drama in its character of a work of art, the question of morality is beside the point. For, as they affirm, there is no internal relationship between morality and art.

Certainly there need not be. Art in its vari-

ous forms is the product and the expression of men's feeling for beauty; and a work of art may be as free of the alloy of morals as is the beauty of nature itself. Perhaps it shows best and purest when it is, notwithstanding Ruskin's dictum that the highest type of art is that which is in the service of religion. But the abstract expression of beauty is only possible to the drama in a very limited degree. Now and then may appear a creation of pure fancy, such as *Peter Pan*, in which there is no possible suggestion of morality; but in almost every case the material of the drama is directly concerned with the motives and conduct of human beings. It can with difficulty, therefore, escape the implication of moral issues, unless we are prepared to admit that men and women may divest themselves of moral responsibility.

As a matter of fact, it is just this admission that we are requested to make in the case of the great majority of farcical comedies. The innumerable plots, though ingeniously different in details, are wont to have a general agreement; they are based on some infraction of the moral code, either real or apparent, and the action resolves itself into the effort to escape detection

and its consequences by every conceivable and inconceivable kind of lying and chicanery. They are as utterly immoral as that time-honored farce-tragedy, Punch and Judy, or as those games of our childhood in which we way-laid, robbed, and murdered one another, and carried off our sisters to languish in solitary confinement in the wood-shed. Looking back however, to those sportive crimes, we see them to have been not immoral, but unmoral. We were only playing at being bad, and I don't think were any the worse in consequence.

Is it not much the same with these farce-comedies? They are the adult's way of playing at being bad. An adult, it is true, might be better employed; he might, for example, be improving his mind. But, if we are wise, we shall give our minds a rest now and then and indulge in foolish recreation. Yes, we will even indulge in the childish sport of making believe we are wicked. In which case, if we are of average mental healthiness, we shall have no thought of moral or immoral. The question of morality will not intervene; our attitude of mind is simply unmoral; we view the play solely as an ingenious intrigue of escapades and

drollery. That is to say, if the author has been as clean-minded as ourselves, and has invented the game in a spirit as unmoral as a child's. If, on the other hand, he has allowed an immoral suggestion to enter into his own mind, is himself conscious of the wickedness of what he is engaged in and by word or act conveys the consciousness and suggestion to his audience, he is going beyond the bounds of decency and his play should be condemned.

But, it will be urged, who is to be the judge of this? Will not one person's sense of decency be outraged sooner than another's? It is true; and perhaps the only answer to this objection is that those with a highly impressionable sense of decency, which frequently is nothing more than a deficiency in the sense of make-believe and a temperamental inability to look at any subject except in relation to reality, had better stay away from the average farce-comedy. But let them be very careful how they try to influence others to stay away by raising the cry of immorality. To do so will only defeat their good intentions. It will stir a desire in many people, who would otherwise have been indifferent to the piece, to go and see it, and will

ensure that their condition of mind as they witness it will be entirely immoral. They will then go to the play with an unclean curiosity and watch out for suggestions of pruriency. Even if they do not find them, as possibly they will not, they will have suffered some contamination; not, however, so much by contact with the play as with the suggestion of its well-intentioned censors.

It is the recognition of this that makes, or should make, a critic so chary of condemning a play on the score of immorality. Probably his wisest course, if he sincerely desires to deter people from seeing it, is to treat it with a stony neglect. But this book is not meant for critics, who, after all, are only the advance posts of criticism. The real judgment of a play rests with the public. But, you will ask, if this is so, is it not the duty of the critic to warn them, and the duty also of the public who have seen the play to testify their disapproval; and will not this stir up the unwholesome interest that a moment ago we depreciated? Thus the deeper we look into the matter, the more difficult does it seem to be. But the difficulty, I believe, is largely due to a wrong way of approaching the

subject. It is usually understood that something should be done by somebody to protect the public against the contamination of plays which exceed the bounds of decency. But what if the public should protect itself? Yes, and that younger portion of it, which constitutes the majority of audiences, — is it everlastingly to be treated as if it could not be trusted? Cannot it be encouraged to protect itself? The only censorship that will effectively prevent or kill objectionable plays is starvation in the box office. The issue, therefore, rests with the public; and why should not the latter, young and old alike, recognize and shoulder the responsibility? By the time that a preponderating majority of the public regards it as a squalid thing to witness a play of evil suggestion; and that men and women are mutually soiling themselves and losing each other's respect by sharing in the dirty business, the difficulty will have been solved. Then, and not till then. If it cannot be solved this way, it is insoluble.

Granting this, how can one form for oneself a standard of criticism for this kind of play? I repeat, it seems to me that the wholesome attitude is to recognize that certain plays may

be written and enjoyed in that child-spirit of make-believe that is neither moral nor immoral, but absolutely non-moral. That under these circumstances topics which, if they were seriously considered, would be distressing and least capable of exciting laughter may be legitimately subjects of humorous treatment. If, on the other hand, the author descends from the atmosphere of abstract suggestion to acts and words of concrete suggestiveness, his play is no longer entitled to the sanction that is permitted to a work of art. We recognize and repudiate it as an exploitation of what is gross.

When, however, we are confronted with a serious drama, the question of morality assumes a different aspect. There are, firstly, the two broad distinctions: the author has selected a theme that involves an infraction of the moral code, but with what purpose? Is it with the wanton purpose of causing a sensation or with the honest one of grappling seriously with some vital problem of social life. It should be our effort to detect the sincerity or insincerity of his motive. Thus to refer again to *Paid in Full.* Is the third act, in which the wife at her husband's instigation visits the man whom they

both believe to be a libertine, an example of sincerity or insincerity? Has it any elements of being a typical case? Typical in a general way of the supreme sacrifices which many a good wife makes for a bad husband? In the play itself is there any antecedent probability that the husband, cur though he is, would sink to such meanness; that the wife would or should submit to such an outrage? And again, has the conclusion of the scene any bearing whatever on the moral issues involved? Does it claim to be, or, in effect, is it, the solution of any moral problem whatsoever? Is it not rather a situation that does not grow out of the action dramatically, but has been thrust into it; a theatrical device, involving a question of morals, but not treated as a moral problem; introduced simply as a telling episode that was bound to make a sensation?

I leave the answer to my readers: but before you decide compare the, at first sight, similar episode in Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna*. There, you will remember, the wife visits at night the tent of her husband's antagonist. But it is at the latter's demand; against her husband's wishes and to save the lives and homes of the

beleaguered citizens. From the very rise of the curtain the issue is plain: the sack of the city is imminent; and out of this the problem develops: to avert the horror, since there is no other way, shall a wife sacrifice her own and her husband's honor; may not the dishonor, like martyrdom, bear its own crown of glory? The problem solves *itself*: the shining purity of the woman's honor brings her through the ordeal unscathed; she leads captivity captive. But then comes the finale; the hostile general could respect her honor, but her own husband cannot believe in it. He thrusts her from him. It is made plain to us that he was never fit to be her soul-mate; that his sense of honor by the side of hers was as a walled-in garden, lying at the foot of a mountain, whose snowy summit defies pollution and incites mankind to a worship of its purity. Treated, as it has been by Maeterlinck, in a spirit of exquisite reverence, the theme is no longer a particular episode. It has become the symbol of a higher conception of the beauty and the power of purity.

In a general way, then, when an author raises a moral issue, we shall test his sincerity by some such question as the following: Has he

convinced us that he himself considered the issue to be of vital importance as a social problem; has he approached it with a single-minded intention of facing the problem in its bearing on society? Has he worked it out to a conclusion that is consistent with his intention and with what he conceives to be its importance? If we cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, the play, so far as we are concerned, will be suspected of being theatric rather than dramatic. That is to say, in the sense in which we have ventured to distinguish these two words, the moral issue has been used as a stirring device for creating stage effectiveness and not as a contribution to the serious criticism of some vital phase of life.

Bring, for example, this test to bear upon Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and Sudermann's *Magda*. The heroine in each case is a woman with a past; and the problem involved is the consequences of this fact to herself and others. As Pinero raises the issue, she has been the mistress of many men before she marries a widower with a grown-up daughter. He is ostracized by society, and the pair retire to the country, where the wife is oppressed with

ennui and jealous of her husband's affection for his daughter. He fears her influence upon his daughter and sends the latter away. The girl falls in love with an officer; and her choice seems an admirable one, until it is discovered that her fiancé has been one of her step-mother's lovers. The woman, haunted by her past and feeling that its taint pollutes the happiness of others, shoots herself. The author, having raised the issue, pursues it with remorseless logic and represents the successive developments with a skill of play-craft that ensures its stage effectiveness. In fact it is one of those plays that are known as "actor-proof." Its effect may, of course, be improved by the individual qualities of the acting, but it is not dependent upon them; it practically plays itself. So much for the author's treatment of the issue; but what of the issue itself? No doubt it represents a slice of life, but has it any of that wide application to actual social conditions that give it the significance of a type? Is it not rather, as conceived by the author, exceptional and individual? He himself seems to have been conscious that his theme might be thus criticised, for toward the end of the play he

makes the husband exclaim, that all the misery has come about through men leading what they condone as "a man's life." But this was an afterthought. It did not enter into the original conception. Had it done so, our attention would have been directed upon an abstract problem of very large and vital significance. Is there, on the other hand, in Magda, any suggestion of a larger issue?

Magda returns to the home of her girlhood. Years ago she had been driven out of it by the tyranny of her father, a domestic martinet who regards the keeping of the women folk in a position of dependence as a solemn principle of home life. She is now a famous opera singer, but only after years of struggle. During these she had known a student, who, however, deserted her to face motherhood alone. Returning to her home, she finds this former lover a highly considered friend of her father's family. This adds complication to her relations with the latter; but the main point is that she is a woman with an independent will and the courage to exert it and to abide by the consequences. She is in revolt against that sacrifice of womanhood which a false ideal of the home life entails. Her

spirit is too free, too eager to touch life at many points, too restlessly conscious of power in itself, to brook the small and narrow surroundings in which convention would have kept her imprisoned. From the first, this, without going into particulars of the play, is the issue raised by Sudermann; and one must feel that it is an issue of very wide application and vital significance.

So much for the first consideration that confronts us in a serious play, dealing with a moral issue: how far, in fact, the character of the issue is theatrical or dramatic; with what degree of sincerity or insincerity the author has propounded it. Secondly, we have to consider the character of the conclusion at which he arrives. That it is a logical conclusion, naturally developed from the theme selected, is not enough. The author has raised a moral issue, and must be judged by moral considerations. Is his conclusion in accordance with the sanctions of morality? It is in regard to this question that I am confident we should be cautious of a hasty decision.

Society, if it is to endure in a healthy form, must be based upon morality. But what is

morality? Is it something that society everywhere recognizes as the same thing and of the same value, as all men do in the case of a lump of gold? Does not its standard vary in different parts of the world; so that, for example, in some cases, as a preparation for marriage, young men and women are not allowed alone in each other's company, whilst elsewhere they are encouraged to freedom of intercourse? Is it not a fact that morality in its final analysis is nothing more or less than the standards of right thinking and conduct which communities have agreed upon? They are standards sanctified, as the words moral and morality imply, by *custom*. But may not customs change? Is it not a fact that they do? Will any one maintain that our standards of morality are the same as those upheld in the Middle Ages? We believe them better; but for that reason are they incapable of further betterment? In a word, an author's conclusion, as was Ibsen's in *A Doll's House*, may seem at variance with morality. True, it ran counter to what was at the time of its appearance the customary standard regarding the sanctity of marriage. But did that make it immoral? Yes, a thousand times yes, was the immediate reply.

Well, since that date men and women have done a power of thinking, urged thereto by Ibsen. He had dared to look facts in the face and judge them by a higher standard than that born of the morality of his day; and he pointed out, what thousands of men and women now believe, that under certain circumstances marriage itself may be immoral; that, where mutual respect and the unity of soul have ceased to exist, separation may be the more moral course of conduct. Moreover, his play, apart from the specific point of its conclusion, contributed largely to that freer and franker discussion of the relations of the sexes that has marked the last quarter of a century, with the result that men to-day have a more worthy respect for women, and women more respect for themselves and more realization of their responsibilities and possibilities.

Not even yet, however, is the end in sight. Innumerable adjustments must still be made between the sexes, before each in mutual equality can round out its perfect self. In this progress the drama must play its part. It should be a big one, for there is no other influence so potent. Let us not, then, from any

false notions of modesty, frown upon the playwright who selects the sex question for his theme. There are others, it is true, of vital importance; but none more vital, since it penetrates to the very source of human life. Only let us insist that each problem shall be approached with sincerity and developed with single-minded intention of facing facts and reaching a just conclusion. Lastly, before we condemn the conclusion, let us be sure we have faced the facts as closely and as clearly as the author.

CHAPTER VII

GENESIS OF A PLOT

OUT of the innumerable plays, submitted to managers, we are told that very few exhibit any knowledge of play construction. An even greater ignorance on this subject probably distinguishes an average audience; interfering considerably with its appreciation of the drama. For, while we may enjoy a play, a picture, a piece of sculpture, or a musical composition without any acquaintance with the technique involved in it, that fuller and higher appreciation which results from an alliance of feeling and intelligence can scarcely be enjoyed without it. For technique is so directly the expression of the artist's individuality, and so interwoven, as warp with woof, in his work of art, that to be ignorant of it is to be incapable of entering intimately into what he creates. So our purpose now is to suggest to the playgoer the fundamental principles of play construction.

INTERIOR OF THE SWAN THEATER.

As sketched by Johannes DeWitt, a Dutch scholar, about 1566.

It will be recalled that while the division of the play into acts is purely at the discretion of the author, the division of the plot into five stages is a fundamental principle. It is based upon the simple fact that anything which is complete in itself — and a play, like any other work of art, must be this — has a beginning, a middle, and an end; and directly we apply this to the telling even of a simple story we find the need of two intermediate stages of growth. We cannot jump from the beginning to the middle. Having made a start we find ourselves carrying it forward and developing the story so as to lead up to some central point; and then, as surely, need some gradual elucidation that will lead to the conclusion. Take, for example, that story in the "Ingoldsby Legends." The facts are that an old gentleman goes to bed, wakes up in the morning to find his clothes gone, and eventually they are discovered in the shrubbery. Well, that is what happened; but the story, thus told, will not satisfy us. We need firstly to be interested in the man, so that the climax of his embarrassment may be appreciated, and secondly to receive some explanation, accounting for the conclusion. The author

therefore, having introduced us to the old gentleman, proceeds to tell us that he is a very shy old bachelor, who never before has slept away from home, and detests any interruption of his daily routine of living. His habits are very methodical and he folds up all his clothes carefully and places them on the chair beside the bed, not without some apprehension of the morrow, for he is due at breakfast an hour earlier than his usual time and the family are extremely punctilious and expect even their guests to be punctual at meals. In this way we are prepared to enjoy the humor of the situation, when the old gentleman discovers his loss and is at his wits' end what to do; for there is no bell in his room, he cannot communicate with the servants, and waits in a fever of shame and vexation, until some one comes to see why he tarries and the whole household is aware of his ridiculous embarrassment. By the way, I have forgotten to state that he brought with him only the one suit of clothes which he had on. Instead of going back and inserting this information where it should have been given, I confess to the omission, in order to emphasize how careful the playwright must be to include every detail that is

essential to the explanation of the situation. He must anticipate every question as to why the old gentleman did this and why he could not have done that.

Now, however, the audience is waiting for a solution of the mystery of the disappearance. It will not be satisfied with their discovery in the shrubbery; it demands and has a right to be told how they got there. The author's ingenuity must now be expended on the denouement or untying of the knot of the mystery, so that he may gradually prepare us for the final discovery or solution. To cut a long story short, I will remind you the explanation is that the old gentleman, when mentally disturbed, walks in his sleep; and the fun consists in the method invented by the author to find this out. For this I refer you to the "Ingoldsby Legends"; since my present purpose is not to relate the story, but to use it as an example of the fundamental principle of all stories or plots, complete in themselves, that they involve: first, an Introduction; secondly, a Development thereof, leading up to the third stage, the Climax; and fourthly an Untying of the knot, or a gradual tackling one by one of the conditions produced

by the climax, until the fifth and last stage is reached, and the story or problem the author set out to relate or solve is brought to a satisfactory Conclusion.

Here let us note a broad distinction between the technique of a story and that of a play. The play must tell itself. So too may a story; though in the majority of cases it is the author who tells it. Even if he makes the characters in their dialogue develop the plot, he is ever at hand to introduce his characters, and help us to an understanding of them, sometimes by merely a qualifying adjective or adverb, often by direct explanation or description. Behind almost every story, especially the most thoughtful ones, we are continually conscious of the directing mind of the author. But in a play the consciousness of the author's share in the work should be entirely obliterated. It can only be so when the author has given a complete reasonableness and naturalness to his action, so that each phase of it unfolds itself and prepares the way for the following phase, which in its turn moves onward with apparent inevitableness.

Thus, the old-fashioned device of a prologue, if used as a means of explanation of what is to

follow, is a clumsy intrusion of the author's personality. So too the putting of a soliloquy into the mouth of one of the characters is a risky expedient. If it excites any suspicion of having been adopted in order to get certain facts before the audience, which they must know and the author could find no other means of imparting, the soliloquy is intolerable. On the other hand, under certain conditions it is not only justifiable but most effectively dramatic; witness the soliloquies of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Brutus. But each of these in his separate way is an idealist and a dreamer; Hamlet, given to solitary brooding; Macbeth with the artistic imagination that gives concrete form to abstract ideas; Brutus with the mental habit of weighing causes and effects; all three under a great mental strain. It is no shock to our sense of probability to hear them think aloud; and their thoughts are so introspective that they seem to be part of themselves and to remain with them. It would be different, however, if they came down to the footlights and proclaimed their sentiments to the audience. At once the art which conceals the art would disappear; we should detect a trick for getting

at our intelligence or emotions by undramatic means.

It is this that is so amusingly parodied by Sheridan in *The Critic;* referring to an author's clumsy method of getting his introductory facts before the audience. A rehearsal of the tragedy, you remember, is going forward in presence of Puff, the author, and his friends, Dangle and Sneer.

Enter Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Christopher Halton.

Sir C. True, gallant Raleigh!
Dangle. What, they had been talking before?
Puff. O yes, all the way as they came along.
Sir C. True, gallant Raleigh!
But oh! thou champion of thy country's fame,
There *is* a question which I yet must ask:
A question which I never ask'd before; —
What mean these mighty armaments?
This general muster? And this throng of chiefs?

. . . . . .

I cannot but surmise — Forgive, my friend,
If the conjecture's rash: — I cannot but
Surmise, the state some danger apprehends!

SIR W. You know, my friend, scarce two revolving suns,
And three revolving moons, have clos'd their course
Since haughty Philip, in despite of peace,
With hostile hand hath struck at England's trade.

SIR C. I know it well.

SIR W. Philip, you know, is proud Iberia's king?

SIR C. He is.

SIR W. His subjects in base bigotry
And Catholic oppression held, — while we
You know, the Protestant persuasion hold.

SIR C. We do.

. . . . . .

SIR W. You also know —

DANGLE. Now, Mr. Puff, as he knows all this, why does Sir Walter go on telling him?

PUFF. But the audience are not supposed to know anything of the matter, are they?

SNEER. True; but I think you manage ill: for there certainly appears *no reason* why Sir Walter should be so communicative.

PUFF. Fore gad! now this is one of the most ungrateful observations I ever heard; for the less inducement he has to tell all this, the more I think you ought to be obliged to him; for I'm sure you'd know nothing of the matter without it.

DANGLE. That's very true, upon my word.

In the following chapter we will study by comparison with this, which after all is not so very extravagant a parody of some authors' methods, a typical example of sound play-craft, Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, but for the present, as a preparation to it, there are some general points to be considered.

Genesis of a Plot

Let us try, in the first place, to trace the genesis of a play in the author's mind. It has been well said that the motive of a good play can usually be expressed in a few words. Thus, that of *Hedda Gabler* might be stated as follows: — a woman, temperamentally unsuited to her surroundings. Innumerable are the ways in which this germ of an idea might be expanded. Which one shall Ibsen adopt? It is decided, of course, by his personal outlook upon life. It is his habit to regard heredity rather than environment as the determining influence upon character. This woman, then, shall be different from the people about her because of certain traits that she has inherited. These shall bring her into conflict with her surroundings. It is inevitable; and, because her traits and theirs are irrevocably fixed, there can be no compromise. She cannot alter her environment, it cannot change her; the conflict must be to the death. Which shall conquer? the environment or the individual?

The individual — individualism! This was a subject continually uppermost in Ibsen's mind; the duty of the individual to develop to the full his or her individuality; the virtue of daring

to be individual; the need of individualism, as the likeliest means by which society can be regenerated. Hedda Gabler shall have a pronounced individuality. Shall it prevail? Will she dare to develop it to the uttermost? Ibsen decided not. She shall be one whose desire is strong, but whose courage fails her. She shall work havoc on her surroundings; but in the end their aggregate weight shall overwhelm her. That much is settled.

But to Hedda's weakness of will a contrast must be introduced. Another woman shall present it; a woman, tame in character beside the brilliant Hedda, but with a clear courage and a quiet strength of will that achieves. She shall not destroy, like Hedda; she shall build up.

By this time the scope of the conflict has widened. It is more than the clash of a particular individual with her surroundings; it has become also a conflict of principle, embracing the abstract question of human will. The action of the play — as was to be expected in the case of Ibsen — while it will represent the acts of the different personages in the actual doing, and will unfold itself to ear and eye, will be in its highest aspect a mental action. The real

drama will be enacted in the minds of the various characters, and will be followed mainly by the mind of the audience. What is seen and heard will be but a token of the internal conflict.

Does this idea present a difficulty to any of my readers? If so, it may possibly be cleared up by the following consideration. When the drama of the Civil War was being enacted, with the world as audience, the foreign portion of that audience followed the progress of the conflict with infinitely less acuteness than did the American. The former had a sentimental and, it may be, a material interest in the issue; but to Americans it was one fraught with a momentous principle. No matter on which of the two sides their sympathies lay, the conflict for them was not confined to the clash of arms. The mind of each was a battle-field, in which fear and hope, pity and suspense, contended; and it was this vast background of a nation's mind in conflict that gave its mighty significance to the actual movement in the drama of the war.

Now, will not the parallelism of this with the conflict of a drama be pretty close? Behind the obvious clash of conflicting characters the

author projects as a background the larger, weightier issue of a conflict of principle. It is this which arouses the profoundest interest of the audience. Each member of the latter, in the light of his own experience and consciousness of himself, follows the conflict step by step in his mind, in its close relation to his own weakness and strength. The action on the stage is but the outward, visible, and audible sign of the inward action which the play involves; and which the author's genius has aroused in the minds of his audience. The person who cannot realize in his own mind this inward conflict of principle is an outsider, viewing the drama in the merely superficial way that the outside world watched the conflict of North and South.

But to resume our attempt to reconstruct the genesis of *Hedda Gabler*. Behind the conflict of the individual and environment, Ibsen determined to project the principle of Will in relation to the development of Individualism. To *Hedda* and to Mrs. Elvsted, types, respectively, of the cowardly and the courageous will, he must find foils. To permit of additional sources of conflict, they shall be of the opposite sex. Hedda must have a husband. Though her will is

rebellious, it is of the sort that finds safety for itself in the conventions. To add to the point of this, her husband shall be of a markedly conventional type. He shall be George Tesman, a student, absorbed in dry-as-dust historical research. Thea Elvsted, on the contrary, must have a lover. Her nature is as quiet as a smooth sea, her will sunk fathoms deep, until the wind of passion stirs, when her will shall rise in waves that sweep aside all bounds. With her strength of will shall be contrasted a vacillating will, with her quietness of character, that would rather follow than lead, a brilliant headstrong man. He shall be called Eilert Lövborg.

To this pairing off of the characters there must be some separate contrast. The mismated union of the conventional Tesman with the unconventional Hedda suggests a third person to complete the triangle. He shall be at heart an unscrupulous libertine; but outwardly conventional; a respected official, say a judge — Judge Brack. Finally, as a complete foil to the various jars of strong and weak wills, of convention and unconventionality, of individualism with its environment, there shall be a character, at odds neither with itself nor others; a character

congenial with its environment, yet no slave to the conventions; possessed of a clear, firm will that, however, finds its highest expression in serving the happiness of others. She shall be Miss Julia Tesman, George Tesman's aunt.

Here to hand is abundant material for a drama; involving a variety of occasions of conflict, and at the same time permitting all these tangled issues to be coördinated to one overmastering cause; the twofold clash of principle, as between individualism and environment, and between weakness and strength of will. A story or plot will soon unfold itself; indeed, it has already begun to ferment in the author's imagination.

For, as what we have been studying has suggested, the true genesis of a drama is not the result of first thinking of a story and then fitting characters to it; but of first determining what shall be the nature of the conflict. This settled, the author selects certain characters to take part in the fight. They will figure, to use the Athenian term, as "protagonists," "deuteragonists," "tritagonists"; personages of first, second, or third importance; but it is they themselves, through the interaction of their respective

motives and conduct, who must decide the nature of the conflict. The author, as it were, will sit back and watch them; and, so doing, discover the story of the plot unfolded before his mental vision.

Nor should this be reckoned merely a metaphor. It is a fact. The inexperienced author may ignore it, and that he does so may help to explain the reason of his failures; but the analysis of any play that has stood the criticism of time will reveal that this was its process of germination and development. It must be so, because it is the way of life. Turn a number of contrary-tempered dogs loose into a barn and they will settle for themselves the story of the conflict. Bring a variety of human beings into close relations, and their respective characters will determine the issue. You may try to compel the actions of one or two of them into a groove of your own devising; but, as the old adage has it, "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley."

This letting the characters act out the drama for themselves, is stated by Maeterlinck. "If," he writes, "I can successfully create real human beings and let them act as freely in my mind as

they would act in the universe" — the passage leads to a conclusion that is beside our present point; but the fragment shows the author's attitude of mind in approaching the development of the plot. It is not that of an inventor, but of an observer. Neither is this to underrate the imagination of the author. On the contrary, it is to reckon it of higher capacity, exhibited not in irresponsible fancy, but in a peculiar sensitiveness to the mysteries of human life.

Nor is this recognition of the fact that the plot should unfold *itself* of service only to the playwright. For the student also of the drama it is a basis of criticism and appreciation. After he has assured himself of the author's motive, stated in its simplest terms, and then of the expansion of the motive, effected by the choice of characters, he will examine the development of the plot and satisfy himself as to whether the action involves actualities that would be likely to arise from the clash of the various personalities, and that their conduct is what might be expected under such circumstances and in view of the action and reaction of the characters upon one another.

Before recapitulating the plot that these "real human beings," created by Ibsen, acted "freely and naturally" in his mind, let me note what perhaps should have been mentioned before, that Ibsen's point of view on this occasion is purely objective. He does not set out to prove or to commend anything. He is not to be understood as wishing to justify what happens, much less to point a moral. While the action is concluded so far as the characters and conditions involved are concerned, there is no conclusion arrived at as to the right or wrong of the general principle involved; no attempt to suggest any theory of bettering the conditions. For the time being he assumes the role of an investigator, pure and simple, who analyzes the conditions and records them. If it is lamented that he did not go further and offer some suggestion for ameliorating or averting the conclusion, let us realize that to do so would probably have defeated the purpose he had in mind. This was to use the popularity of the stage as a platform from which to draw people's attention to the great subject of Will in its relation to heredity and environment; not to exhaust the problem at one sitting, which its magnitude and intricacy would make

impossible, but to open the minds of his audience and stir their interest, so that they might be prompted to search for a solution elsewhere. Had he himself attempted a solution, it would have been at once too hastily accepted or rejected; in either case, drawing off the minds of the audience from his main purpose: to make people, on so important a question, think for themselves.

When one looks into the matter, what we call a moral is only a generalization that conforms to our customary conventional way of looking at things. It is an expression of that over-respected commonplace, "Be good and you will be happy," and its assumed corollary, "If you are bad, you'll suffer for it." Most of us would rather that a play ended happily; if it doesn't, we wish to be assured that the disaster is the fit consequence of badness. We overlook the fact that to be good in expectation of happiness is a low ideal, just as much as to avoid badness simply from fear of the consequences; moreover, also, the huge fact of life, that goodness is often accompanied by disaster and that wickedness may flourish like a green bay tree; that, indeed, the good and the bad are most strangely

mingled in the scheme of nature and the heart of man. More probably we know all this only too well; and yet humbug ourselves with a petty lie that confirms us in crass indifference and profound hypocrisy.

But serious plays, especially those of modern times, in their analysis of character and conduct, deal with contradictions of human nature — with conditions that conflict with our accepted notions of right and wrong; with the thousand and one considerations that seem at variance with the harmony of the universe. We must not expect to find in them a comfortable little conformity with childish aphorisms; or an attempt to "get them down fine" into a petty formula. A larger geometry than is yet dreamed of is needed to adjust the harmony. Meanwhile the rôle of the playwright is to prepare the ground for a solution by opening up the minds of the audience to the existence and the facts of the problem. He may, if he chooses, venture also upon the rôle of prophet and suggest a possible plan of solution. But it should not be demanded of him. The work of investigator, if done honestly, may well be sufficient for one man.

And now for the story of themselves that the "real human beings," created by Ibsen, "acted in his mind." It shall be stated as briefly as possible. Hedda is daughter of a General Gabler, an aristocrat, brought up without a mother's influence; trained to ride and shoot; "terrible grand in her ways"; very curious about life. One of her companions, named Eilert Lövborg, is a harum-scarum youth; she takes pleasure in hearing about all his escapades; as a result of the freedom of intercourse he is disposed to take liberties with her; she threatens to shoot him with one of her father's dueling pistols. In time the "beautiful Hedda Gabler," though besieged by admirers, one of them being a Judge Brack, whose designs, however, are patently unmatrimonial, has danced herself tired. She feels she has reached an age when she must marry, and singles out George Tesman, a student with expectations of a professorship in the university, a man whose connections and respectability are beyond all question. Brought up by a maiden aunt, who has divided her unselfishness between him and her invalid sister, he has grown so accustomed to be cared for and watched over that he is a sort of learned ninny. Hedda and

he are married and go off on a six months' tour, during which he pursues his researches in the libraries of Europe. She is bored to death and chafes at the fact that she is to become a mother, apprehensive that it will tie her down to conventions and bring her under the ministrations of her husband's aunt. The latter, in their absence, at great personal sacrifice, has seen to the furnishing of their home, assisted in the business arrangements by Judge Brack, who is establishing his position as a "friend of the family." When they return home, the husband is full of plans for his work, his wife restless and soured. Among the first callers is Mrs. Elvsted, a schoolmate of Hedda's; she is in trouble. It appears that she was compelled for a livelihood to become housekeeper to a widower with children, who, to save the expense of her wages, marries her. The union is childless and loveless. For the education of her step-children, Lövborg is engaged as a tutor. His reputation had become very bad; drink had ruined his prospects, and he was regarded by everybody as "down and out." But the quiet influence of Mrs. Elvsted works regeneration. He gives up drink, writes a book that secures high praise,

and under her inspiration has completed the MS. of another that he anticipates will make him famous. He has come to town to place his work with the publishers; his pockets are full of money and Mrs. Elvsted fears that apart from her he may yield to his old weakness. Impelled by anxiety, and by love, she follows him and appeals to the Tesmans to invite him to their house. An invitation is despatched, though Tesman has already begun to dread him as a rival for the professorship. With Hedda it is at first a curiosity to see her old comrade in his reformed guise; but when she finds that his comradeship has been transferred to Mrs. Elvsted, and that the latter has a power over his will that she herself could not exert, the devil surges in her. She will reassert her old influence at any cost. She tempts him to drink and taunts him into accepting an invitation to a bachelor party at Judge Brack's, where the revelry is sure to run high. His trust in his newly recovered will-power does not save him from succumbing to his old enemy. The orgy is prolonged till daybreak, when he with some of the party repairs to the rooms of a celebrated actress-courtezan. On the way he drops his

manuscript, and, discovering its loss, charges the woman with stealing it. A row ensues, the police are called in and he is arrested for an assault upon them. Meanwhile the manuscript has been picked up by Tesman. Instead of restoring it immediately to Lövborg he brings it home to Hedda and she secretes it, as Brack appears. He takes a malicious interest in describing Lövborg's disgrace, for in his determination to "complete the triangle" in the Tesman menage, he would crush any possible rivalry on Lövborg's part. Presently the latter appears, overwhelmed with shame and in despair at the loss of what he calls "the child" of himself and Mrs. Elvsted. He is bent on suicide, and Hedda, to direct the way, puts into his hand one of the General's pistols. He is no sooner gone than she burns the manuscript. Tesman is appalled at her act; the more so when the news arrives of the suicide of Lövborg. Judge Brack brings it. He has discovered that the deed was committed with one of Hedda's pistols, and she recognizes that he thinks he has her in his power. Meanwhile, Mrs. Elvsted, ready to forgive Lövborg for his lapse from probity, learns of his death and of the loss of their "child." Her

grief is swallowed up in the resolve to protect his memory. She has still the notes from which the manuscript was composed and is determined that the book shall still appear. Tesman, as a secret expiation for the destruction of the MS. and his share in Lövborg's death, offers to help her. The two of them sit down immediately and become absorbed in the work. Hedda sees that again the will of Mrs. Elvsted will prevail, while her own will is threatened by the domination of Judge Brack. She steps into the next room and with her father's second pistol shoots herself.

Such, in brief, is the story which in the next chapter we are to see take shape in dramatic form, and become invested with richness and subtlety of allusion, through the author's sympathy of imagination with the "real human beings" he has created.

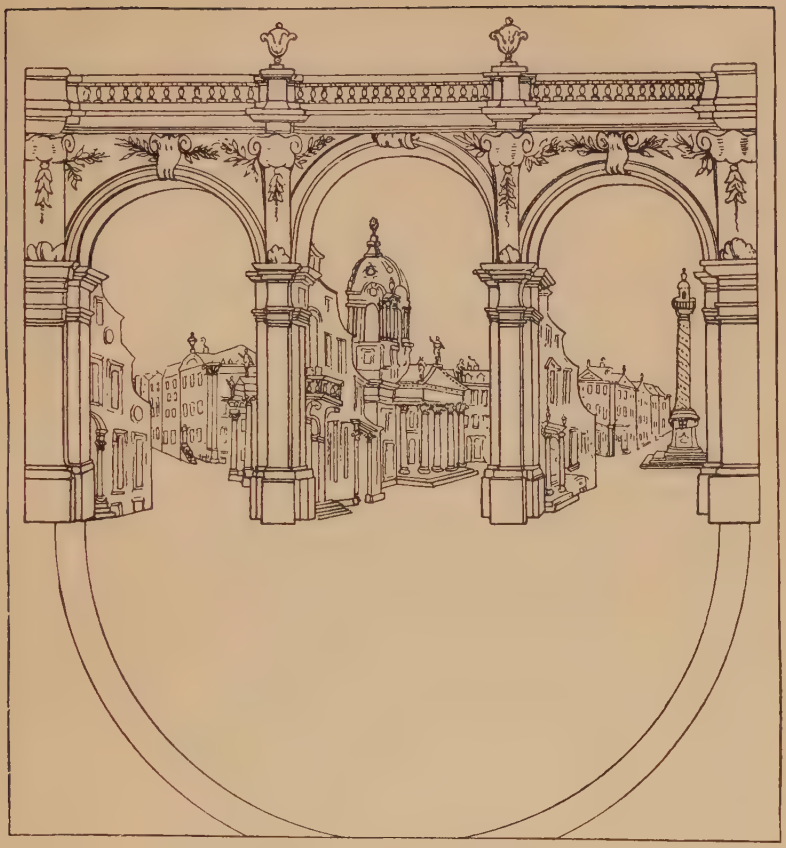
CHAPTER VIII

THE INTRODUCTION

IN the previous chapter we reviewed the motive of *Hedda Gabler*; the expansion of the same that resulted from Ibsen's creation of certain "real human beings"; and finally the story which they told to his imagination. Now it remains to analyze the dramatic form into which that story has been transmuted. It is the product, to repeat Maeterlinck's words, of Ibsen's having let the real human beings of his creation act in his mind as freely and naturally as they would act in the universe.

I have selected this example of Ibsen, because he is a model to whom practically all modern dramatists, either directly or indirectly, are indebted; a model, not only of psychological analysis, but of dramaturgy or the science and art of play construction. He himself was a student of the theater first of all, then of the French playwright, Scribe. His experience as the manager of a theater gave him that practical

acquaintance with the possibilities and limitations of the stage that can scarcely be acquired except by actual stage work. Not that he allowed the stage traditions to shackle his originality; on the contrary, his knowledge of them was as much a warning as a guide. Knowing them thoroughly and having analyzed their degree of worth or worthlessness, he was in a position to use, modify, or reject them. He brought a similarly independent judgment to bear on the technical methods of Scribe's plays. The latter were distinguished by a conciseness and compactness of form, in which all the parts were closely and naturally related; by a logic as clean and rigid as that of a scientific proposition. They were, indeed, based upon science, as all art is, and thereby possessed the balance of harmony that must characterize a work of art. But Scribe's plays, by comparison with Ibsen's, are creations light as air. They deal simply with the externals of character, and make much of the intrigues of circumstances. Ibsen's, on the contrary, rely less upon things happening, and vastly more upon the internal workings of human character. Their logic, therefore, is infinitely more trenchant, and their conciseness



THE OLYMPIAN THEATER AT VICENZA.
From Riccoboni's "Histoire du Théâtre Italien."
(See page 49.)

more severely harmonious, demanding a closer observation and a keener intelligence on the part of the audience. It is on this account that they offer so valuable a model both for the young dramatist and for every serious student of the drama. Moreover, his published plays are within the reach of everybody; and I am assuming that the reader will keep his copy of *Hedda Gabler* open before him, as he studies this chapter. In doing so there is one thing that must be borne in mind.

Ibsen was a *Realist;* his plays were a reaction, on the one hand, against the *Heroic* drama that had sunk into stilted artificiality, and, on the other, against the *Romantic* that had become no less artificial by its inflated sentiment. He, therefore, deliberately confined his dramas, at any rate the later ones that are usually acted, to a very ordinary phase of life, excluding with an equal deliberation anything that might lift our minds above the ordinary routine of living. He seldom reared castles for the imagination, peopled with high and noble thoughts that exalt our aspirations or awake the spirituality that may be in us. He built, mostly on the dead level of existence, contracted habitations, low-roofed

with small windows that admit little or nothing of the sunlight of the universe. But what he did was done with so high a purpose and so admirable a craftsmanship, that his plays remain a model for the student. The principles of their technique are as applicable to themes heroic and romantic, and even humorous, as they are to the psychological realism that he made his own. Let us, therefore, "mark, learn, and inwardly digest them."

The scene of the action in *Hedda Gabler* is Tesman's villa in the west-end of Christiania. To be more precise, it is a spacious, handsome, and tastefully furnished drawing-room, opening through a wide doorway into a smaller room at the back. Shall we note in passing the advantage of this double arrangement? The second room gives a sense of extra space to the scene, which, on the other hand, as in the third act, can be made to seem more cramped and contracted by drawing the curtains across the wide doorway. The back room also will permit of a secondary phase of the action being represented there, while the main action is proceeding in the front room. As we view the room we are to imagine a door in the right wall,

leading to the hall; and in the opposite wall another door, with glass panels through which a veranda and garden are visible. Thus there are two means of communication with the outside world: one through the garden, the other directly on the street. Equally there are two modes of access to the other parts of the house, one through the inner room, the other by way of the hall to the staircase. In some stage settings of the play other doors are added, but the above represent the actual number needed for the action. Without describing the furniture in detail, we observe that it presents four nuclei, around which the action from time to time will concentrate. First, on our right, is a stove with seats near it; secondly, on the opposite side of the room, a settee and small table; thirdly, toward the center, a table and chair; fourthly, a sofa in the back room. Into this last, the piano, that in the first act occupies a place in the front room, is subsequently removed.

We will so far anticipate the progress of the action as to note that it has divided itself into four acts. The first introduces all the characters; though, in the case of Lövborg, we only hear about him, his actual appearance being

deferred to the second act. Moreover, two personages — the aunt's invalid sister and Mrs. Elvsted's husband — remain throughout unseen. The second act develops the relations that have been established between the characters, quickens and sets in motion the action in preparation for the climax that occupies the third act; while the fourth disentangles the situation, created by the climax, and leads onto the conclusion. In analyzing each act we will adopt the French device of marking its successive scenes.[1]

Act I. The Introduction

The action opens early, say nine o'clock, on the morning following the return home of Hedda and George Tesman. But, observe, when the curtain rises, we do not know this. In fact, we know nothing; our minds are a blank of expectancy, waiting to receive impressions. One immediately is registered. Clearly the house of well-to-do people of the upper class, with its array of comfort and decoration. Warm sunshine streaming in through the glass doors. Very bright and cheery! Ah! two women, one apparently a servant.

[1] See page 114.

Scene I

Enter, the book says, Miss Tesman, the aunt, and Berta, the maid. Yes, but we are supposed not to have read the play, or ever to have seen it. How then do we discover who they are? We must wait for something in the conversation that will give us the clue. Yet this is but a very small part of the information needed to satisfy our expectancy. One by one, these and the other characters, as they arrive, will be introduced to us; and we shall listen to and watch them; but the action in which they are involved will be unintelligible to us, unless we are also informed to some extent of what has happened to them before the beginning of the play. The introduction must contain sufficient indication of their past to explain the present. It is to the wonderful skill with which Ibsen gets this evidence before his jury that I specially direct your attention here. It is characterized not only by what he tells us; — just so much as, and no more than, is needful for our comprehension of the present; but also by when he tells it; a bit here, a bit there; occasionally only something hinted at, the full knowledge postponed that its effect may be heightened by suspense. So

clumsily and obviously do some authors put us in possession of previous facts, needed to be known, that the exquisite tact with which Ibsen does it should receive our keenest study. Read and re-read the first act, and note just when and how each necessary brick of fact is built into the structure. Every part of the dialogue, in fact, is so essential that it is extremely difficult to summarize it. However, let us try.

Enter a lady in her walking clothes, and a maid, carrying a bouquet, which she places on the piano.

Observe the opening words: "I don't believe they are stirring." An immediate stroke that wakes our alertness. "They." Who are "they"?

Then three strokes in the reply: "I told you so, Miss," an incidental indication that the speaker is a servant, her companion a maiden lady. Then a reference to "them" — "steamboat — last night." So "they" have just arrived from abroad. Thirdly, "the young mistress" — clearly the more important of the two in the maid's eyes.

Immediately after, if you will read on for a page of the book, you learn incidentally that the maid's name is Berta; that she has hitherto been

in the service of "Miss Julia," who has an invalid sister, "Miss Rina," whom both of them have cared for. But — and this is the more important fact — they have also cared for "George." So he is the partner of the young mistress, and at the very instant we get an idea of him. It is Miss Julia Tesman who speaks, thereby suggesting that it is he rather than the young mistress in whom she is particularly interested. "George can't do without you, you see, he absolutely can't. He has had you to look after him ever since he was a little boy." We shall not be surprised to find that George is a bit of a softie. Then, note, on the very heels of this impression is another reference to the "young mistress" — "terrible grand in her ways — "General Gabler's daughter" — "think of the sort of life she was accustomed to in her father's time." "Should never have dreamt that she and Master George would have made a match of it." Ah! as we expected, they are married. Possibly we already have a suspicion that they are ill-assorted.

Next an intimation that George has the Academic Degree of Doctor. "We may have to call him something still grander before long"

— "H'm — wouldn't you like to know!" Not yet, for this indicates an undercurrent of the action, of which we shall be informed later. "But, bless me, Berta! Taken the chintz off all the furniture?" "The mistress told me to. Master George — the Doctor — he said nothing." These last words are the cue for Tesman's first entrance.

Before commencing Scene 2, let us recapitulate what we have learned. George Tesman is married to a daughter of General Gabler — her first name we have not yet learned — and the couple are just returned from their wedding-tour. George, it seems, has been brought up among women, maiden ladies at that; looked after ever since he was a boy; evidently a good little boy who has grown into a nice young man; studious and already a Doctor, with a prospect of further advancement. His wife, however, is socially his superior; brought up by a military man in a grand way. It was a surprise to everybody that she and George made a match of it. There is already a hint of the wife's independence of conventions. "She can't abide covers on the chairs." Orders them to be removed, while George "said nothing."

Scene II

Enter George Tesman, carrying an empty portmanteau. Mutual salutations. Then first intimation of Judge Brack. He had been at the pier to meet the bridal couple, and saw Miss Tesman home. No room in the carriage because of the pile of boxes brought by Hedda. It is her husband who first introduces the familiarity of her first name; and at the same moment, unconsciously, suggests both her extravagance and selfishness. A pile of boxes — she allowed the older lady to walk!

Tesman hands the portmanteau to Berta, who says, "I'll put it in the attic." Note the ingenuity of the device. The introduction of the portmanteau provides both a natural reason for Berta's exit, and also a start for Tesman's conversation. It has been "chock full of documents — picked up from all the archives he has been examining"; he hasn't "wasted his time" on his wedding trip!

There follows a little business over Miss Tesman's bonnet — a "gorgeous" bonnet; bought "on Hedda's account"; — "so that Hedda need not be ashamed of me." George has untied the bonnet and places it on a chair.

They sit affectionately, holding each other's hands. First, an emphasizing of the fact that Aunt Julia has been as a father and mother to George; then another allusion to the invalid aunt; and now on to "beautiful Hedda Gabler, that was so beset with admirers," and later to the wedding tour of nearly six months.

Has George nothing to tell? Oh yes, he has been "grubbing among old records." But nothing *special?* No expectations? Ah! to be sure, he expects to be a "professor one of these days." Aunt Julia laughs to herself and changes the subject to the expense of the trip. "Great," replies Tesman, "but Hedda had to have this trip." The house too — what is to be done with the two empty bedrooms? still Hedda had set her heart on the house — fortunately Judge Brack has secured the most favorable terms; "so he said in a letter to Hedda."

Now it transpires that to help in the payment Aunt Julia has mortgaged her annuity. But Judge Brack has assured her it is "only a matter of form." Besides she has no other happiness in the world except to smooth the way for her dear boy. "And now we have

reached the goal, George; thank heaven, now you have nothing to fear." "Yes," replies the complacent Tesman, "it is really marvellous how everything has turned out for the best."

Now mark — following immediately on this, the first mention of Eilert Lövborg. Says the aunt, in the selfishness born of affection, "The people who opposed you have fallen. Your most dangerous rival — his fall was the worst. And now he has to lie on the bed he has made for himself — poor misguided creature." Tesman knows whom she means, and it is Tesman, the one most interested in the matter, that is made to tell us. "Have you heard anything of Eilert Lövborg?" "What — published a book — Eilert Lövborg!" The reply is, "Yes, so they say. Heaven knows whether it can be worth anything." And the implication is: Heaven grant it may not be. "But when your new book appears, George —" "What is it to be about?"

Note carefully the reply, for it is leading up to the end of the scene and Hedda's entrance. "It will deal with the domestic industries of Brabant during the Middle Ages" — "I have all those collections to arrange first." "Yes,

collecting and arranging — there you are my poor brother's own son." "I am looking forward eagerly," he says, "to setting to work at it; especially now that I have my own delightful home to work in." "And," suggests Aunt Julia, "the wife of your heart." He puts his arms round her and kisses her. "Oh! yes, yes, Aunt Julia — Hedda — she is the best of all! I believe I hear her coming — eh?"

To recapitulate — what addition has this scene made to our knowledge and how has it advanced the progress of the story? We are pretty well assured of the character of Aunt Julia; much more important, we know very nearly all that is to be known of George Tesman; a booby — a grown-up baby, that has been coddled and dreads competition; a dry-as-dust student, absorbed, not in the facts of the present but in musty researches into the past. As to Hedda — the contrast of her character has been still further enforced; her extravagance pointed out, and the question raised: is she expecting to become a mother? Moreover, three allusions have helped to familiarize us with the name of Judge Brack and to raise a question as to his relations with the other personages of

the plot; and a most significant reference has been made to another character — Eilert Lövborg. He has fallen into disgrace, and yet, great surprise, has written a book that has been well received.

That these two characters should have first been brought to our notice in Tesman's scene is significant. Ibsen is not satisfied merely to get the facts before the audience. He exhibits the tact and subtlety of his method in two ways: first, by making the information reach us through the person who will be affected by the coming facts — both these men are to step between Tesman and Hedda; secondly, by insinuating the information a little at a time, so that the suspense of expectancy is prolonged, and the mind of the audience stimulated to form its own conjectures. This is particularly true as to the appearance of Hedda. The audience has already formed some idea of her general characteristics, and is in eager expectation of a fuller acquaintance.

She is the principal character in the play and careful provision has been made that her entrance may be duly led up to. This, of course, is a very usual device of playwrights. They

get their play well started before bringing on the chief person; and it is a device that naturally commends itself to the vanity of "stars." But let the student note that Ibsen did not consider the device indispensable; Nora, for example, opens the first scene in *A Doll's House.*

However, to resume. "Oh, yes, yes, Aunt Julia (embraces), Hedda, she is the best part of it all. I believe I hear her coming — eh?"

Scene III

Enter Hedda; a woman of nine and twenty; face and figure of refinement and distinction; pale complexion; eyes with a cold, unruffled expression; a tasteful, somewhat loose-fitting morning gown. To Aunt Julia's — "Good morning, *my dear Hedda,*" she replies (holding out her hand), "Good morning, dear *Miss Tesman.*" Embarrassment, followed by a commonplace — "Has the bride slept well in her new house?" "Passably; of course one has always to accustom oneself to new surroundings, Miss Tesman — little by little." Not a word of pleasure at seeing Miss Tesman; or of approval about the house, or the joy of being in it. On the contrary, a fretful complaint. "The

servant" — not, mark you, familiarly by name — "has opened the veranda door and let in a flood of sunshine." "Shut it — no, not that! Tesman, please draw the curtains." "Yes, fresh air we certainly must have."

At this point Miss Tesman presents George with a parcel, wrapped in newspaper. "Hedda — isn't this touching, eh?" (By the way, have you observed his exasperating trick of saying "eh?"; as if he were addressing a class, and wanted to make sure the pupils were attentive?) "My old morning shoes! My slippers." Hedda (not interested): "I remember you often spoke of these while we were abroad." "Yes, I missed them terribly. Now you shall see them, Hedda." "Thanks, I really don't care about it." "Oh! you can't think how many associations cling to them." "Scarcely for me" — "Of course not for Hedda, George" — "Well, but now that she belongs to the family, I thought —" But Hedda interrupts: "We shall never get on with this servant, Tesman." "Not get on with Berta?" "Look there, she has left her old bonnet lying about on a chair." Consternation of George and natural indignation on the part of Aunt Julia. She prepares to

take her leave. "But, Auntie, take a good look at Hedda before you go! See how handsome she is!" — "Oh, my dear boy, there's nothing new in that. Hedda was always lovely." But Tesman, disregarding Hedda's "Oh! do be quiet," persists in calling attention to her splendid condition; how she has filled out, which he attributes to the mountain air of the Tyrol. Hedda (curtly), "I am exactly as I was when I started." "So you insist; but I am quite certain you are not. Don't you agree with me, Auntie?" Meanwhile, the latter, having forgotten her wrath, has been gazing at Hedda. "Hedda is lovely — lovely — lovely." She goes up to her, draws down her head and kisses her hair. "God bless and preserve Hedda Tesman — for George's sake." It is the only time in the play that her full married name is mentioned. Hedda gently frees herself. "Oh! let me go." Miss Tesman, with quiet emotion, assures her: "I shall not let a day pass without coming to see you," and with a lingering "Good-by — good-by" goes out into the hall, accompanied by Tesman.

Hedda paces the floor, *says nothing*, but raises her arms and clenches her fists, in des-

peration. Then she flings back the curtains from the glass door, and is standing, gazing out, as Tesman re-enters. He goes to pick up the slippers, remarking, "What are you looking at, Hedda?" She, calm now and mistress of herself, replies, "I am only looking at the leaves. They are so yellow — so withered." He, wrapping up slippers, "Well, you see, we are well into September now." She, again restless, "Yes, to think of it! Already in — in September."

Now follows a talk about Aunt Julia. How strange and solemn her manner. What was the matter with her? Was she annoyed about the bonnet? Hedda asks, and adds, "I shall manage to make peace with her." But she will not promise to treat her with intimacy, and at the suggestion that she should, now that she belongs to the family, exclaims, "I can't in the least see why." A pause, then Tesman: "Is there anything the matter with you, Hedda — eh?" "I am only looking at my old piano. It doesn't go at all well with all the other things." She will put it in the inner room, "and get another for this room — of course, when convenient."

And now preparation is made for the entrance

of Mrs. Elvsted. Hedda picks up a bouquet. It is the one that was brought in by Berta at the commencement of the play and laid on the piano. It contains a card, with the name of Mrs. Elvsted, who is destined to be Hedda's rival. Note the extraordinary skilfulness of this and its no less remarkable subtlety. Placed there, before a word was uttered, for the purpose, it has been like seed in the ground, until the time was duly arrived for it to appear above the surface; and then it is discovered by Hedda. Written on the card are the words, "Shall return later in the day." Then quickly we learn that she is Sheriff Elvsted's wife — Miss Rysing that was; the girl with the irritating hair, who was at school with Hedda and was an old flame of Tesman's. "It's odd that she should call." "I wonder," says Tesman, "how she can endure to live in such an out-of-the-way hole — eh?" A sudden thought on Hedda's part: "Tell me, Tesman — isn't it somewhere near there that he — that Eilert Lövborg is living?" As Tesman's reply, "Yes, he is somewhere in that part of the country," is uttered, Berta enters to announce the arrival of the lady who had brought the flowers.

To recapitulate: The scene has informed us that there is not between Hedda and her husband the sympathy that might have been expected six months after marriage; it has confirmed our notion that he is a ninny; it has told us much about her. She is ill at ease; fretful, despondent. She feels that she is in the grip of a humdrum life; hates the thought of becoming a mother, since it will fasten the grip tighter. She looks back to the old days of which her piano is the token; feels that her life has reached its September, already yellow and withered. She is more than indifferent to the feelings of others. She can be cruel; witness the episode of the bonnet. She is a disappointed, possibly a dangerous woman. It is clear she never liked Mrs. Elvsted. Already a suspicion connects the latter with Lövborg, who has not been entirely absent from Hedda's thoughts, for by a slip of the tongue she alluded to him as "he." We have a presentiment of trouble, though no inkling has been given of the shape which it will assume.

Scene IV

Enter Mrs. Elvsted: a woman of fragile figure,

with pretty, soft features, abundant hair, almost flaxen. She has a startled, inquiring expression. Hedda, whatever may be her real feelings, greets her warmly. Tesman fumbles with her name, calling her Mrs. Rysing. Mrs. Elvsted says she arrived yesterday, about midday, and was in despair when she heard that the Tesmans were not at home. Yes, she is in trouble, and knows no other creature here that she can turn to. Hedda draws her to the sofa.

Well, what is it? Mrs. Elvsted: "Oh! I am so anxious you should not misunderstand me." "Then," replies Hedda, "your best plan is to tell us the whole story." "Yes, of course it is," says Mrs. Elvsted; but, observe that she doesn't tell the whole at first. Her trouble is that Eilert Lövborg has come to town, "has been a week in this terrible town, with so many temptations on all sides."

Then Hedda — "But, my dear Mrs. Elvsted, how does he concern you so much?" "He was the children's tutor." "Your children's?" "My husband's. I have none." "Was he regular enough in his habits?" asks Tesman, "for the post? Eh?" "For the last two years his conduct has been irreproachable." "Fancy that,

Hedda," he says; and she replies, "I hear it." After which, note that she remains silent, while Tesman inquires into the reason of Lövborg's coming to town. He became restless after his book was published and made such a sensation. The book, Tesman surmises, was written in his better days. "No, he has written it all since he has been with us — during the last year." Tesman: "Isn't that good news, Hedda?" But Hedda is still silent. It is Mrs. Elvsted who says, "Ah yes, if only it would last!"

Now it is Hedda that speaks: "Have you seen him here in town?" then a moment later, "It seems to me a little odd that your husband doesn't come himself and look after his friend." "Oh, no, no, my husband has no time. And, besides, I — I had some shopping to do." Hedda smiles. "Ah, that is a different matter." Mrs. Elvsted now appeals directly to Tesman, on the score of his old friendship with Eilert, to receive the latter at his house and keep a sharp eye upon him. Tesman promises, and Hedda suggests that he write a letter of invitation — and at once. Tesman, having gathered up the slippers, retires to write it. Note that it is to Tesman that Mrs. Elvsted has looked for help.

Left alone with Mrs. Elvsted, Hedda's manner changes to smiles and cajolery. She knows there is something more to tell. "We'll have a cozy, confidential chat, — tell me about your life at home." When Mrs. Elvsted demurs, Hedda reminds her that they were schoolfellows. "Yes, but how dreadfully afraid I was of you then. You used to pull my hair, and once you said you would burn it on my head." But Hedda's present cajolery disarms her fears. She has not been accustomed to kindness; she has never had a home; and she tells how she went as governess to Sheriff Elvsted's children and five years ago became his wife. "And Eilert Lövborg," inquires Hedda lightly, "has been in your neighborhood about three years?" "Yes; he came to us every day; he gave the children lessons. Yes, my husband was often away from home, being sheriff he had to travel."

Before we go any further, have you noticed what excessive care and deliberation Ibsen is expending in telling of this affair of Thea Elvsted's? As a matter of fact, her relations with Lövborg are to be the lever which sets the action of the plot in movement; therefore, as

is his wont, Ibsen makes sure of the fulcrum on which the lever rests. To be certain of our attention, he creates a suspense in the telling of Thea's and Eilert's previous relations; he unfolds the facts in three stages, which are cumulative in their interest. First, while Tesman is present, Thea gives a guarded and somewhat garbled account that, however, stirs our suspicion of the actual facts; secondly, when alone with Hedda, a more intimately detailed one that tends to confirm it; thirdly, as we are now to see, a still more intimate account which, while it leaves no doubt of the facts, tends to arouse our sympathy both with Thea and with Eilert, and, whatever we may think of the former's conduct, at least obliges us to admit the daring and decision of her character.

Hedda closes in upon the third stage of the narrative with a burst of assumed sympathy. "Thea, my poor sweet Thea, — now you must tell me everything, exactly as it stands." "Well, then," replies Thea, "you must question." Hedda does, and draws out the knowledge that Thea's husband is twenty years older than herself; that they have no single point of sympathy; that he regards her "simply as a useful prop-

erty"; that he cares for no one but himself, and perhaps a little for the children. For Eilert Lövborg? "Oh! dear no. What put that into your head —? Did I say that he sent me after Eilert all the way to town? Yes, I suppose I did."

And now mark the sudden change in Thea's demeanor. She is cornered, and what does she do? "I may just as well make a clean breast of it at once," she says vehemently. So now the woman, who up to this point has seemed so fragile, and soft, and startled, wriggling in the tightening grasp of Hedda's questions, takes the first place in the dialogue. Hedda's share is mainly ejaculations. It is Thea, who, as she says, will make a long story short. She has come without her husband's knowledge, and will never go back to him. She could not face the loneliness of the future. She had to come. "There was nothing else to be done." "People may say what they like for aught *I* care. I have done nothing but what I *had* to do." Then, prompted by a question of Hedda's, she describes frankly and freely how the intimacy between her and Eilert came about. The word "love" is not mentioned; she describes their

relation as that of comrades. It began by her obtaining a sort of influence over him, so that of his own accord he gave up his old habits; then it developed into her being allowed to help him in his work, and ended by her becoming an inspiration to him. Meanwhile, she realizes that between her and him there is the shadow of another woman. "Who can that be?" asks Hedda anxiously. "I don't know — someone he knew in his — in his past. Someone he has never been able wholly to forget." And while we of the audience can scarcely fail to recognize that the shadow is Hedda herself, Thea says that Eilert has told her that, when he and the woman parted, she threatened to shoot him with a pistol. "Oh! nonsense!" exclaims Hedda, "no one does that sort of thing now." Thea agrees, and says that is why she suspects "that red-haired singing-woman whom he once — "for I remember that they used to say of her that she carried loaded firearms." To which Hedda assents: "Oh — then of course it must have been she." Thea, wringing her hands, is saying that "this singing-woman is in town again," when Tesman's step is heard and Hedda whispers, "Thea — all this must remain be-

tween you and me," and Thea eagerly assents.

George Tesman returns with the letter, and Berta, coming in a moment later to announce Judge Brack, is told to post it.

To recapitulate: we have been informed of Thea's relations with Eilert, and that his undoing was due to drink; and have learnt the decision of her character, that she dares to act as her will prompts her; also that she is apprehensive about the strength of Eilert's will-power. As to Hedda: we have received a further suggestion of her having had some sort of relations with this Eilert, who has already been mentioned as her husband's rival in a professional way. Moreover, we have discovered that deceit also is an element in Hedda's character; she can feign a sympathy with Thea, and withhold confidences from her husband. Already we realize that in some way, yet to be developed, she will be closely mixed up in this affair of Thea and Lövborg. In fact, the design of the plot is beginning to appear. Incidentally, there have been significant references to a singing-woman, and to pistols and threats of shooting. Later on we shall look back and see that these,

with the bouquet, mentioned above, were so many seeds, planted against the time when their appearance above the surface would be needed.

Scene V

Let us recall that Judge Brack has already been mentioned three times. He was at the pier to greet the bridal couple and saw Aunt Julia home; in the purchasing and furnishing of the house he secured most favorable terms — "so he said in a letter to Hedda"; also he advised the aunt that her mortgaging of her annuity was only a matter of form.

Enter Judge Brack; a man of forty-five, dark hair and moustache, rather aristocratic, thick-set, well-built; elastic in his movements; a well cut walking-suit, a little too youthful for his age; an eye-glass, which he now and then lets drop. "May one venture to call so early in the day?" — "Of course one may," says Hedda; Tesman adding, "You are welcome at any time." He then introduces Thea to Judge Brack as "Miss Rysing"; one more indication, significant in the light of future events, of how easily his mind resumes the footing on which he used to be with Thea. Her exit has now to be

arranged. Mark the manner of it. Hedda for a minute or two ignores her presence, laughingly pays compliments to the Judge; and when Tesman would extract from him a compliment upon her own appearance, exclaims: "Oh! do leave me alone. You have'n't thanked Judge Brack for all the trouble he has taken." To Brack's reply, that it was a pleasure, she adds, "Yes, you are a friend indeed." Only then does she notice, or at any rate heed, Thea's "impatience to be off." With an *au revoir* to the Judge and a promise to be back presently, she escorts Mrs. Elvsted to the hall door.

During her absence there are three pages of dialogue between the two men. We are to discover the Judge's attitude towards the husband before learning what it is towards the wife. It is characteristic of Ibsen's logical method.

The first point is that Tesman looks to Brack for advice and assistance in financial matters; and the Judge wishes that "*we* had gone a little more economically to work." Tesman replies: "Think of Hedda, my dear fellow! *You who know her so well.* I couldn't possibly ask her to put up with a shabby style of living." To

which Brack — "No, no, that is just the difficulty." When Tesman speaks confidently of his expected appointment, the Judge suggests that it may hang fire; and, when pressed for a more definite statement, turns the conversation to Lövborg. What follows is chiefly significant, as showing how completely Tesman disregards him as a serious rival; he even speaks kindly of his reformation, but adds: "How in the world will he be able to make a living — eh?"

It is upon these words that Hedda re-enters. She observes to Brack, with a touch of scorn, "Tesman is forever worrying how people are to make their living." "Well, you see, dear," replies her husband, "we are talking about poor Eilert Lövborg." With a quick glance at him, she exclaims, "Oh, indeed," seats herself in a chair and asks indifferently, "What is the matter with him?" Tesman utters a few generalities, ending with a wonder what is to become of him. "Perhaps," remarks Brack, "I can give you some information on that point." He has deferred the object of his visit until Hedda's return. Now he goes for it. It is no less than the fact that the professorship is to be decided by competition and that Tesman may

expect a rival in Lövborg. Tesman is appalled. "We have married on the strength of these prospects and run deep into debt." Hedda, immovable in her chair: "A contest, Tesman, fancy there will be a sort of sporting interest in that." When her husband charges her with indifference, she adds, "I am not at all indifferent — I am most eager to see who wins."

Here the Judge intervenes. He thought it best for Mrs. Tesman to know this before she set about any little purchases. To Hedda's retort, "This can make no difference," he suavely replies, "Indeed, then I have no more to say." He has shot his bolt and prepares to leave. He will call in again in the afternoon to pick up Tesman, who promised yesterday on the pier to attend the bachelor party he is giving this evening, and Hedda's last words, as she holds out her hand to the Judge, are, "Be sure you call in the afternoon." (Note in passing how naturally this provides for the Judge's reappearance on the scene.) Tesman accompanies him to the door of the room; but, still agitated, begs to be excused from escorting him further.

Now husband and wife are alone and the end

of the act is at hand. Mark the final touches. "Oh! Hedda, one should never rush into adventures — eh?" She looks at him smiling: "Do you do that?" "Yes, it was adventurous to marry upon mere expectations." And her reply, "Perhaps you are right there." Then Tesman's quick glancing off to the delights of the new home "we both dreamed of"; and Hedda's reminder, slowly and warily uttered, that "our compact was that we were to go into society — to keep open house." For the present they must be content with Aunt Julia's society; no man in livery; no saddle horse. "Well, I shall have at least one thing to kill time with in the meanwhile. — My pistols, George — General Gabler's pistols.' She retires into the inner room.

Tesman, rushing to the doorway: "No, for heaven's sake, Hedda darling — don't touch those dangerous things! For my sake Hedda — eh?"

Curtain

What is the sum total of the impressions received from this introduction? Those which have been suggested step by step, as scene followed scene, culminate in the conviction that

Hedda Gabler and George Tesman are tragically mismated; that he is a negligible quantity; that she — extravagant, cruel, deceitful, soured — is a dangerous woman.

We have made acquaintance with all the characters; and seen all of them except Lövborg, whose actual appearance has been deferred, with the result that our curiosity is piqued by suspense. And already, as we have observed, the foundations of the action have been laid in the relations between him and Thea. Already also there is the shadow of the tragic finale in "those dangerous things" — the pistols; and a flash that we feel to be of irony in Tesman's appeal — "For my sake, Hedda — eh?"

ITALIAN COMEDY SCENE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

(See page 51.)

CHAPTER IX

THE DEVELOPMENT

IN examining the Development and subsequent stages of the plot of *Hedda Gabler* we must summarize as much as possible. This, however, is only due to the space-limits of the present book; and should not be construed by the reader as implying that the succeeding acts do not merit or demand a study fully as detailed as we have given to the Introduction. But by this time the student should be in a position to bring to the study of each act his own individual precision of examination. I have tried to suggest the method; and it is for him to make it his own. He may be assured that the effort will bring its own reward, and that without it the true inwardness of this particular drama, and the general principles of all good drama construction, cannot be fully appreciated.

The scene of the Development is the same as before; except that the piano has been removed into the back room, and a table and chair sub-

stituted for it. It is the afternoon of the same day.

Hedda, dressed to receive callers, is standing at the glass door, loading a pistol. The fellow to it lies in an open pistol-case on the table.

We must delay a moment to note a rule laid down by some writers on the technique of the drama, namely, that in the interval between any two acts of a drama, something must be supposed to have happened that helps the action to advance. No act must resume the action, precisely where it left off, at the end of the previous act. Two recent plays, however, Charles Rann Kennedy's *The Servant in the House*, and Bernard Shaw's *Getting Married*, produced a few months later, have ignored this rule. The latter author, as we have already seen, intended his piece to present an unbroken continuity. He lowers the curtain only for the convenience of the audience. And after it has been down the customary ten minutes, it rises to discover the characters *exactly* in the same position as when we saw them last. The effect is ludicrous, and is permitted to be so; being, in fact, only an addition to the numerous other instances of poking fun at the prejudices of the

public in which the play abounds. Kennedy's motive, however, was to reconcile, as far as possible, the modern divisions into acts with the continuity of action of the Athenian drama. He therefore lowers the curtain only for a few seconds. In that brief interval there has been no time for a progress in the action; but a space has intervened, so, while the thread of the story goes on uninterruptedly, the characters have changed their positions or, at least, their gestures slightly.

The excellence of both these plays proves that the above-mentioned rule may be honored in the breach. On the other hand, they enforce the general proposition that, if there is a deliberate interval of time between the two parts of the action — as in this case, where the time has progressed from morning to afternoon — some progress also in the action must necessarily occur.

What has happened in the present instance? Hedda's restlessness has led her to rearrange the furniture. Her piano, which recalls her past, she has put back into the comparative privacy of the inner room. She has dressed to receive visitors: Judge Brack, for certain, pos-

sibly Eilert Lövborg. Meanwhile the continuity of the mental condition in which we left her is very pointedly suggested by the fact that, notwithstanding her husband's entreaty, she is playing with "those dangerous things" — the pistols.

She looks through the glass doors, sees Judge Brack approaching through the garden, calls to him — we hear his voice in the distance — and fires. "This is what comes of sneaking in at the back door." "Are you out of your senses?" we hear him say; and as he enters, — "What the deuce — haven't you tired of that sport yet? What are you firing at?" "Oh! I'm only firing in the air." And she lets him take the pistol from her and replace it in the case.

It is a strange incident; so strange that it sets us thinking, as it did the Judge. He may take it as a warning to be careful how he tampers with her independence; we, as a reminder that the use of pistols has been familiar to her, and as an indication of recklessness in her character. The Development, in fact, begins with an emphasizing of what is past and a warning note of what is coming.

Presently she shuts the pistols in a drawer of the writing table. Already we have begun to watch "those dangerous things" and to note their whereabouts. Meanwhile, she has been saying how bored she is, that the pistols were a refuge for ennui; and then the conversation turns to her pleasure in once more having a *tête-à-tête* with Judge Brack. Then she descants on the intolerable condition of being constantly in the company of one man and him a "specialist" of so dry and dull a sort; and explains why she married. "I had positively danced myself tired, my dear Judge. My day was done — Oh! no, I won't say that, nor think it either — and George Tesman, after all, is correctness itself. I expected him to attain the highest distinction, and he was bent on providing for me. It was more than any other of my admirers were prepared to do for me, my dear Judge."

This gives the Judge his cue. He would be the trusted friend — "Of the master of the house, do you mean?" — "Frankly, of the mistress of the house first of all, but of course of the master too, in the second place. Such a triangular friendship is really a great con-

venience for all parties." Then follows some banter in which we are shown that it is boredom, not wantonness, that will induce her to accept such a friend. He must be "not the least bit of a specialist." The front door is heard to open; Brack remarks, "the triangle is completed," and Hedda, half aloud, makes an exclamation of weariness, as Tesman enters.

So the Judge's intention has been clearly developed; Hedda's acquiescence in it only partially given.

Scene II

Tesman is loaded with books, among them a copy of Eilert Lövborg's new work, which he has looked into on the way home. He thinks it shows "quite remarkable soundness of judgment." He will go and dress in preparation for Brack's party. By the bye, Aunt Julia will not be here this evening. "On account of the bonnet?" asks Hedda; "No, but Aunt Rina is much worse than usual." "You can't imagine how delighted Aunt Julia seemed to be because you had come home looking so flourishing." Hedda: "Oh! those everlasting aunts!" "What?" "Nothing." "Oh — all right" — and Tesman retires.

Brack inquires about the allusion to the bonnet. She explains. "I pretended to think it was the servant's." "How could you?" "Well, you see" (nervously crossing the room), "these impulses come over one all of a sudden and I cannot resist them."

Later on we shall recall this admission as having an important bearing on Hedda's conduct. Meanwhile, we may admire now the skill with which that allusion to the bonnet made its introduction here quite natural and apparently unintentional.

Brack replies: "You are not really happy — that is at the bottom of it." She admits it. Why should she be? And she proceeds to explain further how she led Tesman on to offer her marriage. She made him share her desire to live in this house; which to her, however, is not home-like. "There is an odor of mortality about it." (Another phrase to be remembered later.) He suggests that what she really needs is a "stimulating experience" — a "new responsibility." "Be quiet," she exclaims angrily, "no responsibilities for me. The only thing in the world I have a taste for is boring myself to death." She hears Tesman approaching.

"Yes, as I thought! Here comes the Professor." And while Brack in a tone of warning whispers, "Come, come, come, Mrs. Hedda," her husband reappears.

The previous appearance of Tesman had drawn from her an expression of weariness; this one an exclamation of disdain. Hedda's lack of sympathy with her husband is developing into positive distaste.

Scene III

Tesman, dressed for the party, inquires if any message has come from Eilert. No, then he will certainly call. His mind is dwelling on the latter's rivalry, for he braces himself up with Aunt Julia's belief that Eilert will not stand in his way. It leads Hedda to remark that, if Eilert calls and will not go with the others to the party, he can spend the evening with her. "Will it quite do for him to remain with you?" urges the correct Tesman; and this permits the information that Mrs. Elvsted is expected.

Brack thinks that to remain with the ladies will be the safest thing for Eilert, since his (the Judge's) parties are, as Hedda once declared,

"adapted only for persons of the strictest principles." "But no doubt," retorts Hedda, "Mr. Lövborg's principles are strict enough." "A converted sinner." On these words Berta enters to announce: "There's a gentleman asking if you're at home, Ma'am."

This short scene has provided for Lövborg's entrance and for Mrs. Elvsted's reappearance. It has also emphasized the character of Judge Brack's bachelor parties.

Scene IV

Eilert enters. He is slim and lean, somewhat worn out. Dark hair, pale face, and color on his cheekbones. Dressed in a new well-cut suit — rather embarrassed in manner.

Tesman welcomes him warmly. "Will you too shake hands with me, Mrs. Tesman?" She does so, and adds, "I don't know whether you two gentlemen —" "Judge Brack, I think," says Lövborg, bowing slightly; with an equally formal acknowledgment, Brack murmurs, "Oh yes — in the old days," but is interrupted by Tesman, who begs Eilert to make himself at home and immediately refers to the book. Lövborg treats it lightly. "There is

very little in it — I put nothing into the book but what every one will agree with. But when this one appears" — and he draws the manuscript from his pocket. "It deals with the future." "But, good heavens," objects Tesman, "we know nothing of the future." (Mark this.) "And yet," replies Lövborg, "there is a thing or two to be said about it all the same." He shows the manuscript. No, it is not in his own handwriting; he dictated it. He would like to read some of it to Tesman this evening.

The latter's engagement to the bachelor party is mentioned, but Brack invites Eilert to join them. He declines. Tesman urges him to accept, but Hedda intervenes. "Mr. Lövborg would rather remain here and have supper with me." "With you, Mrs. Tesman?" "And Mrs. Elvsted." "In that case," says Eilert, "I will remain."

Hedda retires to the hall to confer with Berta. A short conversation between Tesman and Eilert reveals that the latter has no intention of competing for the professorship; it is only "the moral victory" that he cares for. As Hedda re-enters, Tesman exclaims, "Hedda —

just fancy — Eilert Lövborg is not going to stand in our way." "Our way?" is her curt reply. "Pray leave me out of the question."

Cold punch has been served in the inner room and Hedda invites the gentlemen to take some. Lövborg declines, and to Brack's remark, "Cold punch is surely not poison" — replies, "Perhaps not for every one." Hedda will keep "Mr. Lövborg" company, while the others retire into the inner room for drinks and cigarettes. They seat themselves in view of the audience; Judge Brack, where he can keep an eye on Hedda and Lövborg, who under cover of looking at some photographic views of the Alps converse together.

The object of this scene is to acquaint us with the character of the relations that have previously existed between the two, — between Eilert and the woman, whose shadow, as Mrs. Elvsted said, stands between herself and Eilert. Note that the explanation of this intimacy has been reserved for the moment when the knowledge of it will be most effective; namely, immediately in advance of the development of the action, that follows in the next scene. Now and then the conversation is interrupted by the

entrance of Tesman, which affords the relief of a moment's grim humor.

Lövborg immediately addresses Hedda by her maiden name. "Hush," she says, "that was my name in the old days, when we two knew each other." He upbraids her for her marriage. "How could you throw yourself away on George Tesman?" He persists in the familiarity of the pronoun *du*. "You may think it," she says, "but you mustn't say it." "What an offence against Tesman whom you — love." "Love," she retorts; "what an idea!" but adds, "I won't hear of any sort of unfaithfulness, remember that."

Did love enter into their old relations? Hedda thinks it was rather the intimate frankness of two good comrades; and they recall how, while the General sat over in the window reading his paper, they would be close together by the table, always with the same illustrated paper before them, just as they now have the album of photographs, and Hedda used to put round-about questions, so as to make Eilert confess all his escapades to her. What was her motive? "Do you think it quite incomprehensible?" asks Hedda, "that a young girl, when it can be done — without any one knowing

— should be glad to have a peep, now and then, into a world that she is forbidden to know anything about?" Then it was "comradeship in the thirst for life" — why could it not continue? "The fault was yours, Eilert Lövborg; how could you think of wronging your frank comrade?" He asks her why she did not shoot him then, as she threatened? She replies, "the dread of scandal," and he retorts, "Yes, Hedda, you are a coward at heart." She admits it: "a terrible coward"; then reminds him he has found consolation at the Elvsteds. Perhaps he has confided to Thea something about Hedda and himself? "No, she is too stupid to understand anything of that sort." "Stupid?" replies Hedda, "and I am cowardly." And then she confides to him: "the fact that I dared not shoot you down was not my most arrant cowardice — that evening." "O Hedda!" he exclaims, "Hedda Gabler, after all, then, it was your craving for life." "Take care," she whispers, "believe nothing of the sort."

Twilight has begun to fade. The hall door is being opened. Hedda closes the album with a bang. "Thea, at last! My darling Thea — come along."

Hedda and Eilert — they are both revealed — passionate and unprincipled; she only deterred by cowardice; he the sport of any moment's emotion. He is not loyal even to Thea who has saved him. Hedda knows that the only influence she has or ever can exert over him is through gratifying "the thirst for life"; whilst Thea has established with him a comradeship that for the time changed his nature. Thea, too, has proved herself no coward. She may be stupid, but she has dared to obey the call of her will.

We are now prepared for the culminating phase of the Development.

Scene V

Enter Mrs. Elvsted — Hedda's "Darling Thea."

Immediately the idea of Lövborg's emotionalism is developed. His fervor towards Hedda has cooled down; he is under the spell of Thea. "Is not she lovely to look at — we are two real comrades. She and I — we have absolute faith in each other." Thea adds, "Only think — he says I have inspired him." "And then she is so brave, Mrs. Tesman." "Ah — yes —

courage. If one only had that," exclaims Hedda, "then life would perhaps be liveable after all."

For a moment or two she seems like a benignant Peri, welcoming the entrance of others into Paradise, while she herself must remain outside. Then a change.

"My dearest Thea, you really must have a glass of cold punch." "Well, then — you, Mr. Lövborg?" "But if I say you shall? Ah," she laughs, "then I, poor creature, have no sort of power over you." "But seriously — for your own sake" — "or rather for the sake of other people" — "they may suspect that you do not feel confident in yourself. I saw Judge Brack's contemptuous smile, when you dared not go with them into the inner room." "Dared not!" exclaims Lövborg, "do you say I dared not?" "No, I don't say so; but that is how Judge Brack understood it." "Well," retorts Lövborg, "let him."

No, Hedda, of herself, has no sort of power over him. Thea, trembling with anxiety, still holds him by her influence. It is through Thea that Hedda will work his ruin.

"Faithful to your principles: that is what a

man should be." She turns to Thea and caresses her. "What did I tell you, when you came to us this morning in such a state of distraction, in such a mortal terror?" "Distraction," Lövborg bursts out, "in mortal terror on my account — so that was my comrade's frank confidence in me." He raises a glass. "Your health, Thea" — drains it, and raises a second. "Oh, Hedda, Hedda," pleads Thea, "how could you do this?" "I do it?" "I? — are you crazy?" No, it was Thea's doing after all; that partial weakness of her own will.

"Here's to your health, too, Mrs. Tesman. Thanks for the truth. Hurrah for the truth." He empties the glass and is about to refill it. Hedda lays her hand on his arm. "Come, come, no more for the present. Remember you're going out to supper." He puts down the glass and turns to Thea. "Tell me the truth — did your husband know that you had come after me?" Misunderstanding the cause of her anguish, he bursts into excitement about her husband, and again seizes a glass, and is again checked by Hedda.

His emotionalism takes a swift change. "Don't be angry with me, my dear, dear com-

rade. You shall see that if I was fallen once, I have risen again. Thanks to you, Thea."

The other two men return to the room. Lövborg announces his intention of coming to the party. At ten or thereabouts he will call in to see Mrs. Elvsted home. "I hope," remarks Brack, "we shall have a lively time, as a certain fair lady puts it." "Ah," retorts Hedda, "if only the fair lady could be present, unseen, to hear a little of your liveliness at first hand, Judge Brack." He laughs: "I should not advise the fair lady to try it."

As the men go out, Berta enters with a lighted lamp. Thea wanders restlessly about the room. "Hedda, Hedda, what will come of all this?" "At ten o'clock he will be here — with vine-leaves in his hair — flushed and fearless. He will have regained control over himself. Then he will be a free man for all his days. You may doubt him — I believe in him." "Hedda, you have some hidden motive." "Yes, Thea, I have. I want for once in my life to mould a human destiny. I have not the power — I have never had it. Oh, if you could only understand how poor I am. And fate has made you so rich."

She clasps Thea passionately. "I think I must burn your hair off after all." Thea struggles. "Let me go! Let me go! I am afraid of you, Hedda."

Berta announces that tea is ready. "We are coming," replies Hedda.

"No, no, no," replies Thea. "I would rather go home alone — at once!"

"Nonsense! First you shall have a cup of tea, you little stupid. And then — at ten o'clock — Eilert Lövborg will be here — with vine-leaves in his hair."

She drags Thea, almost by force, to the inner room.

Curtain

The motive and character of the conflict has been fully developed. We await the climax. It is being decided during the interval that separates us from the third act.

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CHAPTER X

CLIMAX — DENOUEMENT — CATASTROPHE

IN my copy of *Hedda Gabler* the Introduction and Development occupy 115 pages, while only 70 suffice for the remainder; being divided nearly equally between the Climax on the one hand, and on the other the Denouement and Catastrophe. It would be a mistake to try and deduce from this fact any actual calculation as to the ratio which the several divisions of a play should bear to one another. Yet it indicates what in a general way is true of all plays, that the Introduction and Development demand a proportionately longer treatment; a certain deliberation in acquainting the audience with what precedes the commencement of the action and with the unfolding of the action itself. This being done, the action quickens; frequently the Climax is reached in a few swift bounds, and a corresponding speed and tensity mark the clearing up of the action, while the Catastrophe or Conclusion is compressed into a very short

space of time. It is in compliance with these conditions that we have devoted a proportionately excessive time to the study of the first two divisions of the play, and will now by the briefness of our summary recognize the comparative swiftness of the succeeding ones.

The Climax of a play need not necessarily culminate in a striking situation. As a matter of fact, in Hedda Gabler it does: Hedda's burning of Eilert's manuscript. But one should not expect or demand any such overt act as essential to the climax. The latter should rather be regarded as the turning-point in the action. Here the action has reached its most important point in relation to the principal characters or character; the decisive moment has come to which all that preceded was but a premise and all that follows is only a logical conclusion. The Climax, therefore, must be built up of all that has gone before. It must not be contrived by the dragging in of some situation that has not actually grown out of the whole previous action, bone of its bone, flesh of its flesh. It is because the Climax of *Paid in Full* is not compounded of the elements that have gone before that one may criticize it adversely.

ITALIAN TRAGEDY SCENE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

(See page 51.)

It represents an excrescent rather than an inherent growth. It involved another fault in that, when it had taken place, there was practically an end of the action; nothing left to be cleared up, and only a conclusion so obvious — namely, that the wife could not longer live with her husband — that the fourth act, in which this only is evolved, was a tedious prolonging of the play. The suspense and interest of the audience had been exhausted. They were merely inconvenienced by being detained in their seats for no dramatic purpose.

The Climax, then, while it is at the end of the beginning of the action, is also at the beginning of the end. Though decisive, it is not in itself final. It has brought the action to a pass, where doubt or suspense is aroused as to what the end will be.

Let us summarize the stages of the action that lead immediately to the Climax in *Hedda Gabler*. Following the quick and excited finale of the second act, the third one opens with a few minutes' deliberate retarding of the action. It is a good example of the value of contrast.

Curtains drawn, lamp low, a sort of stifled atmosphere pervades the scene. Hedda is

asleep. Thea sitting up, weary with watching. We learn that outside it is long past daybreak. Hedda wakes. The talk is of what may have happened during the night. There is nothing to do but to wait, and Hedda induces Thea in the meanwhile to go upstairs and to try to get some sleep. Hedda herself is chilly and is putting wood on to the stove as Tesman enters, tired and serious. He has read some of Eilert's book and confesses to a horrid feeling of jealousy. Eilert at the orgie made a rambling speech of how some woman had inspired him, then, coming away, dropped the manuscript. Tesman picked it up and has brought it with him. Hedda inquires if such a thing can be reproduced, written over again; impossible, for it depended on the inspiration. Tesman opens a note that arrived a few moments before he entered. Aunt Rina is dying. He hurries away, leaving the manuscript, which Hedda conceals in a drawer as Judge Brack arrives.

The latter talks about the orgie; how Eilert and some others finished up in the rooms of the "red-haired singer," where Eilert, discovering the loss of something, raised a scrimmage which brought the police, who arrested him and the

others. Brack does not conceal his satisfaction, for now the Tesmans cannot receive Eilert, and he himself loses a troublesome rival. He retires by way of the garden, and shortly Eilert hurries in.

In a few minutes Thea reappears. Eilert tells her it must be all over between them; she can be of no more service to him; she must go back home. Never: she will stay by him and see the book published. "It can never appear," replies Eilert, "I have torn it into a thousand pieces." "It is child-murder," cries Thea, "you have killed our child."

But when Thea has gone out, Eilert in a scene of terrible intensity confesses that he has lost the "child" in the riot of last night: there is nothing left for him to but make an end of it all. Hedda urges him to "do it beautifully," and hands him one of the pistols.

Left alone, she puts the manuscript into the stove. "I am burning your child, Thea; I am burning your child."

To one who studies this scene carefully it is evident that there is not a single detail in it for which provision has not been previously made. It is to the minutest particular related organi-

cally to what has gone before. Even the strange request that ended with "do it beautifully" has been prefigured in the allusion to his appearing with vine-leaves in his hair. This was one of the latest touches in the previous act; it is developed here, and will form an important feature in the Denouement. It reveals one more strand in the strangely tangled web of Hedda's character: a horror of ugliness, a need to have even the horrors of life disguised in beauty.

* * * * * * *

When the Denouement brings bit by bit the description of Eilert's end, this last desperate hope of hers, in some way to influence him beautifully, is shattered. His end was ugly. Another phase of the Denouement proceeds from the incident of handing him the pistol. Brack, having discovered that it is Hedda's; he has a hold over her. The third element of the Denouement evolves itself from the question raised in anticipation of the Climax: the manuscript having been inspired as it was, can it be reproduced? Yes, Thea still has the notes; Tesman will co-operate with her in bringing back to life

her "child" and Eilert's. Thea's will triumphs. Hedda, reduced to the last extremity, of knowing that her will is at the beck and call of Brack, shoots herself with the remaining pistol.

Thus the Denouement not only clears up the circumstances attending the death of Eilert, but by developing another element of Hedda's character, of which a hint had already been given, it invests the death with a certain freshness of interest and sustains our interest in the principal personage of the play. A similar use is made of the clearing up of the wrong done to Eilert and Thea by the burning of the manuscript. It also reacts on the principal personage, completing her discomfiture. Hedda's sands have run completely down before she resorts to the Catastrophe.

In a word, from first to last the play is compounded of parts organically related to each other and to the whole.

CHAPTER XI

THE MOTIVE OF THE PLOT

PERHAPS I may be criticised for what will seem to some readers the undue space devoted to the study of a single play. If so, I must have the courage of my judgment, and take the consequences. But once more let me explain the reason of my judgment. I might have illustrated the several divisions of a drama by reference to a great number of plays of various dates and character. My experience, however, of such a method is that it leaves a rather shallow impression on the mind, whereas what the genuine student is looking for and, I think, is entitled to expect, is that his mind shall receive the imprint of something definite. He seeks a solid basis on which he may take his stand, and which may serve as a starting-point for wider and wider study. Such a basis he can find in the play-form we have selected for analysis.

It is the type to which the modern drama is

shaped; and it affords a standard by which older types may be compared and appreciated. For it is a type that is rigidly scientific in its character, and, as we have already noted, the best works of art have a scientific basis. Rodin once remarked that "art is founded on mathematics, only the artist must not let his mathematics grow cold." He must use the mathematics with a warmth of imagination, fluency of handling and mastery, that are elements in the art with which he conceals his art.

Similarly, if we ourselves can master the value and the method of the mathematics involved in the technique of a single play, so scientifically constructed as Hedda Gabler, we only need a little imagination, and some fluency in the handling of our knowledge, to apply it to any play, old or modern. We shall find, for example, that corresponding mathematics characterize the technique of the Greek tragedy; the difference between the latter and our model being only one of degree. The Greek is not so complex or so threaded through and through with significances of detail, because the motive is neither realistic nor so penetratingly pyschолog-

ical. The issues are treated in a more general spirit of universal significance, and the form into which they are cast is consequently on broader and simpler lines. But, if we analyze a Greek tragedy, we shall find that the action marches from stage to stage of the five divisions and with a steadiness of tread and a compactness of rank-formation, as resolute and inevitable as in the drama we have studied.

In Shakespeare, too, the action progresses from one to the other of the five stages; but for the most part not with the same steadiness and compactness. The treatment still bears the traces of the Mediæval play-form out of which it grew, and is affected also by the influence of the "novels" from which the story of the plot was so often derived. Its march is looser in formation and straggles over a wider field. Often the action involves more than one motive, combining at least a twofold thread of interest. In a word, it is the material that Shakespeare used, and his own point of view towards it, that determined the actual mold into which he cast the form of his drama. And both were characteristic of the "spacious times" of the Renaissance, when human nature had burst forth in

countless streams of individual energy; just as the springs in the hills, let loose after the frosts of winter, mingle with one another, and flowing on, fed by myriad other streams, swell to a mighty torrent that urges its career to the ocean. It was this boundless activity of human energy, glittering and many colored under the sun of the poet's imagination, that provided the material and suggested the treatment of Shakespeare's dramas; and the form they received was a necessary one for the embodiment of the action. When we apply to it the test of the form we have selected as a type of study, we notice at once the difference and the reason of it. We shall not, however, deplore Shakespeare's lack of scientific clearness and cohesion; the looseness of the fundamental mathematics of his technique; on the contrary, we shall recognize that the play-forms he constructed were suitable to the embodiment of the themes he selected and the manner in which he chose to view them. Nor shall we fail to notice that in his later plays, in *Macbeth* and in *Julius Cæsar*, for example, when his style had thoroughly matured, both the material and the play-form exhibit a marked change. The plot

has been unified, character more closely analyzed, and, as a result, the play-form is more compact.

In great contrast to Shakespeare's motive and method are those of the French tragedian, Racine. They represented a rebound from exuberance of material and treatment to the severer form of the Athenian and Roman drama, of which they were a conscious emulation. That they were so, was not in its origin a pedantic revival; on the contrary, it was the expression of that instinct for "architectonics," or the art of logical construction, that characterizes the French genius. The French are the true remnant of the classical ideal; and it was natural that they should experiment with the classic forms of the drama. In time, however, stateliness of structure stiffened into mannerisms, and exalted sentiment and diction were replaced by empty and pretentious bombast, which, in turn, produced a reaction.

It took the shape of the Romantic motive. It was no new force in drama; for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is not alone among his plays in being romantic; and Corneille, inspired by the example of Spanish romances, wrote *The*

Cid. But it was reserved for the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth to develop the Romantic motive to a point that for a time established its supremacy. Originating with Goethe, it culminated in Victor Hugo. It was the direct antithesis of the formalism of the classic drama. As befitted the times that gave it birth, its motive was the assertion of the individual, and, not so much a reasoning individual, as one possessed by and at the mercy of emotions. The theme is human passion, regarded as the be-all and the end-all of existence. The situations in which the conflict of passions is enacted must share their color and violence, their freedom from the ordinary restraints of every-day life. They must be wild and varied, fruitful in surprises. So, too, with the treatment of the theme. Poetry is its natural medium; but a poetry not submitting to the rules of classic tradition; on the contrary, teeming with the spontaneous force of the author's own impetuous personality. Daring therefore takes the place of logic; the author does not lead the mind on step by step to a conclusion that is acceptable to reason; he takes captive the imagination, and either sweeps it

onward in a torrent of emotion or lures it through the glamour of the senses.

In the Romantic Drama, therefore, while the progress of the action corresponds in principle to that of the scientific model, we shall not look for such severity of design or for so close a tissue of related parts. To repeat our former simile of a Venetian mural decoration, the design will be characterized by amplitude of masses, laid on with a big brush, filled with glowing color. Moreover, instead of an exact logic regulating every part, the relation of the masses and colors will compel our admiration rather by the daring of their contrasts and by the surprises of their similarities. In a word, we shall have to extend our idea of the probabilities; we shall not judge them by the standard which we apply to the relations of every-day life; on the contrary, we are prepared to be astonished, to find ourselves confronted with strange and unexpected situations and with characters more pronounced than usual. We shall expect to be transported into an atmosphere tense with excitement, heavy with passion, portending storm, that may be followed by clearing sunshine or, more likely, by the wrack of devastation.

It was only natural that a motive, demanding so exuberant a personality on the part of the playwright, should in time spend itself, exhausted by its own excess of vitality. But there was another reason for its temporary disappearance. Both in literature and in painting it dwindled before the onward movement of the scientific spirit that was penetrating the mind of the mid-century. No less eagerly than the natural-scientists themselves did the novelists, dramatists, painters, and sculptors study nature. The prevailing motive of the young and ardent now became the Naturalistic; the representation of man, as he is seen to be in the surroundings that he naturally occupies.

As the student of modern literature and painting knows, this Naturalistic motive in time developed two manifestations. While the *Realist* applied a minute and extended study to the phenomenon he had selected to represent, the *Impressionist* sought to convey the instant impression produced upon his eye and mind by its momentary appearance. At that first single glance he could not see everything; he would therefore put down only what he could see, in all the fervor and spontaneousness of the first

impression. By degrees the Impressionist came to attach more importance to his own impression of the phenomenon than to the latter itself. His idea was that, if people desired exact knowledge of the phenomenon, they should resort to photography or to a personal examination on their own behalf. What was of supreme value in a work of art was a manifestation of the artist's own impression. Even the Impressionist, however, could not detach himself from the scientific spirit that was in the air. It led him to a very exact study of one element in the phenomenon; namely, the quality and quantity of the lighted atmosphere in which it appeared. He realized how much his own impression was affected by the conditions of the light, as they themselves affected the forms and the colors of what he saw. Accordingly, the appearance of the lighted medium became a specific feature of his study; and the rendering of it an important characteristic of his recorded impression.

This allusion to Impressionism has shaped itself into words that are especially applicable to painting; and quite naturally, for it was the painters who first suggested this motive to the

modern mind. How, then, is this motive represented in the drama? We will note this presently, meanwhile observing that it is represented by no means so directly and exclusively as that other naturalistic motive — Realism.

The latter has for a long time been the keynote of the modern drama; and it was for this reason that we selected *Hedda Gabler* as a model for study. It is an example of the realistic motive, influenced by the scientific spirit. That is to say, its motive is not merely to portray real characters in relation to real surroundings and situations; but, on the one hand, to dissect and lay bare the characters with the impersonal scrutiny and thoroughness of the anatomist, and to analyze the relation of character to environment with the precision of the chemist; and, on the other hand, to expend a science, akin to that of the architect's, in building up the elements of the action into a logically complete structure. It is the scientific point of view, exhibited alike in analysis and construction, that distinguishes the truly realistic drama of modern times from some which by comparison may be called pseudo-realistic.

The latter, both in the exaggeration of melo-

drama and in the severer form of drama, affect a realism that at best is merely superficial. It breaks down altogether when any sort of scientific test is applied to it. In the first place, the characters are broadly generalized; only here and there in the case of a principal personage do we find any suggestion of a distinct individuality, much less any insight into the workings of his or her mind. Indeed the intention has rather been to sketch a personage that will be at once recognized by the greatest number of people as a familiar type. It is by this means that a bid is made for popularity, and the latter is usually secured. The audience, recognizing the type, lends itself uncritically to an easy enjoyment of the play. If this were all, however, there would be comparatively little for the more critical to object to, since, surely, there is a place on the stage for a portrayal of life in its broad outlines, as well as in its intimate personal aspects. But usually this is not all.

The pseudo-realist, using the naturalistic motive, not with the seriousness of an artist who studies life, but with the shrewdness of the opportunist who aims only at popularity, clutters up his scene with a superabundance of

realistic details and of realistic bits of business. He knows the fondness of the ordinary public for a picture in which they can find the representation of a great number of objects that look "so natural like," and he plays upon it. He introduces into the scene, horses, cows, donkeys, fire-engines, or express trains, and his audience is thrilled with delight; inside his painted well he sets a pan of water, and people come on for no other purpose than to ladle some of it into a bucket, whilst the audience nudge themselves and whisper in awed amazement: "See, it's real." Or he will suspend the action of the piece, that the principal character may go to a cupboard to change his coat or hunt for his slippers, while the audience giggles with delight at a patch on the old man's shirt-sleeve or a darn in his worsted socks. Or, when the climax of the action is approaching, he will obscure the effect by bringing in a band to operate the national anthem, and children to execute a patriotic drill. These are but a few out of the countless devices that the fertile brain of the pseudo-realist evolves to produce what he is pleased to call "local color"; and the audience, enamored of seeing something that

looks "so natural like," applaud the ingenuity by which they are deluded into belief that all this is very artistic.

It is not artistic, because it interferes with that harmony of relation which should distinguish the ensemble of a work of art. It distracts attention to details, which are not essential to the main conception of the theme; but are treated by the playwright or stage-manager as important in themselves, and are so regarded by the inartistic public. The net result of this confusion of unnecessary accessory with the main fabric of the action is equivalent to the kind of painting, made familiar by the old Düsseldorf school of painting and painters of the type of J. G. Brown. No man is more popular than the latter with uneducated picture-lovers. They delight to run their eyes over the clothes of the little shoeblack, and note the exactness with which each button and patch and seam is represented; and then to examine in detail the blacking-bottles, brushes, and other accessories of his occupation. They do not recognize that in the separate insistence upon each and every one of these bits of detail the painter has frittered away the significance of

his composition as a whole, until in the artistic meaning of the term it is no longer a pictorial composition, because it lacks the unity which results from subordination of detail, but is instead a collection of odds and ends, such as might be paralleled, for example, in the contents of a lady's work-box.

On the other hand, if they would study a really artistic example of genre painting, a picture, for instance, by Terborch, Vermeer, or one of the other masters of the Dutch School of the seventeenth century, they will find that, while the details may be as numerous as in the other picture, they are subordinated to some central idea, usually the creation of a harmonious ensemble of related colors and of effects of light and shade. The picture counts first and foremost as a perfectly balanced unity.

In a play, of course, the central idea should be the main theme, embodied in the action. This should be paramount. Anything that delays or distracts or obscures its steady, inevitable, sustained marching onward is false in art. It may "please the groundlings, but should make the judicious grieve."

Then, again, the pseudo-realism of a drama

may be exhibited in the lack of probability or suitability, attending the introduction of the various situations. The point is that, if the author selects as his theme a story from real life, and peoples his scene with real types of human character, he is under an obligation to represent them in circumstances that we can accept as possible, and to make them conduct themselves in such manner as they probably would do under the given conditions. Nor does this imply that the circumstances must be such as one would have expected. We know that in real life it is the unexpected that often happens. But, as we have already noted, life and art are not the same thing. A work of art, even though based on real life, must have a unity of its own, a composition of harmoniously related parts. Or, applying this test to a drama, even the unexpected must be given some show of inherent possibilities. It will involve a surprise, but must not shock us by its incongruity. Thus in *The Old Homestead*, when the father comes to New York and, happening to walk down Broadway at night-time, meets his "erring son," whom he has not seen for many a long day, we may be as surprised as he is. But is the chance

of meeting incredible? In actual life it certainly is not. In the play, however, what is the impression created? Has the author so arranged the meeting, or made some preparation for the possibility of it, that we can accept it as an unexpected yet reasonable event; or does it leave the impression of a device, resorted to in defiance of probability, solely for the purpose of a theatric situation? This question has been raised in connection with the very play that we have selected as a model. It has been objected that Lövborg would not be likely to carry his manuscript about with him. But Ibsen takes pains in more than one place to make this reasonable by suggesting Lövborg's eagerness to get Tesman's opinion on it. When, however, toward the end of the play, Thea is made to produce the notes of the burnt manuscript from her pocket, the probabilities are somewhat strained. This unexpected happening is necessary to the Denouement, since it enables Thea and Tesman to get to work at once upon the rewriting of the book; but can we accept it as justified by inherent probability? Some critics refuse to do so. Others admit the improbability of the device, but pass it over as of little im-

portance, compared with the value of the situation that it is the means of creating. And, after all, this will often be the test that it is best to apply. We shall overlook an apparent strain upon our credibility, if the end seems to justify the means. For, if it does, this may be regarded as at least one way of securing a harmony of relation between the parts and the main theme.

Frequently, however, the improbability of situations and the introduction of unnecessary and distracting details are associated with weakness in the portrayal of character. That the latter should be represented in broad outlines is not, as we have suggested, necessarily inconsistent with truth to life. The type may be based upon actual observation of human nature. But too often in plays of the pseudo-realistic brand the types of character are merely repetition of stage types, which in their origin may have had a basis in actual life, but have lost their truth of resemblance; just as the face on an old coin may be worn out of all semblance to the original design by constant handling and passing on from one person to another. The stage-father, of the genial and indulgent or the crotchety and domineering variety; the meddle-

some mother-in-law; the comic policeman; the smart servant or simpering ingenue; the villain with his waxed moustache and cigarettes; the young cub of a lover, or the ogling old dandy — these and other well-worn stage puppets are constantly reappearing even in the modern dramas that pretend to realism. They may masquerade under new names, but they are the same old types that have become staled and disfigured by reiteration. With such, even in the new dresses of the latest fashion, criticism should have no patience.

A variant on this tendency, to substitute for real human beings the shadow of a shadow, is the practice of providing some actor or actress with continuous opportunities of reproducing some type in which he or she has gained popularity. Even granted, which is not always the case, that the original type was based upon truth to nature, it grows by reiteration to be more and more mechanical. It is hard enough for even a conscientious actor to maintain the freshness and spontaneity of a real creation through the wearing and deadening processes of a long run. But what is to become of him, if at the end of the run he is compelled to take up

a similar part, thinly disguised under a new name, to dress it and depict it along the same lines, and to repeat himself in this way not once, but indefinitely; as long, in fact, as the public will applaud? It is almost impossible for him not to become a mere puppet, whose actions are jigged to rusty wires. As a rule he makes a virtue of necessity; callously ignores the ideals with which he started out to be an artist, and sets himself to the mechanical task of reproducing the old shocks of emotion or points of humor by devices that repetition has ossified into mere tricks and antics of voice and gesture.

Unfortunately it is just this shop-worn stuff that commands the highest money reward. And why? Simply because of the infatuation of an unthinking public for following one another's tails in an endless circle. The same sheep-like behavior is exhibited in the matter of pictures. If a painter is so unfortunate — from the point of view, I mean, of his artistic development — as to make a popular success by painting a certain kind of subject in a certain kind of way, straightway the public enters into a tacit conspiracy to prevent him from doing anything else. Those who in buying pictures

follow the lead of other buyers — and they are the majority — demand of the painter a similar brand of goods to that which he has furnished to the other so-called connoisseurs and patrons of art. Their clap-trap word is "characteristic." They want something, as they style it, characteristic of the painter. If the latter, being a strong man, and independent, replies: "My character, by which I presume you mean my personality, is necessarily something that must change with time and experience. I hope it will grow in power and freedom; it is my purpose that it shall, for otherwise, since change is inevitable, it will become impotent and slavish. Therefore let me sell you something that I honestly believe is characteristic of the development which my art has achieved since its first success." — If he should be, from a worldly point of view, so independent as to say this, the sheep-like connoisseurs will tell him to go hang. He must repeat himself, or they wash their hands of his pig-headedness. Dare we blame him, if compelled by the rigors of necessity, or even, if lured by the bait of easy competence, he throws his scruples and ideals to the winds and consents to prostitute himself? If he has

a sickly conscience he will continue to the end a disappointed man; if his conscience be of a plethoric kind, impervious to pricks, he will wax fat and put on the airs of a "leading artist."

It is precisely this debasing influence that is brought to bear on dramatic art. Actors and actresses, who started their careers with high ideals concerning the dignity of their Art and keen aspirations to develop themselves to the utmost in its service, are lured into the paths of easy virtue and prostitue themselves and their art at the clamoring of a sheepish public, which dulls their consciences with bleating that they are "favorite artists," Favorites, yes; but artists? Surely their accomplishments are of another order — commercial. If we must find a name for them, let it be rather successful artizans of dramatic industry; and let the playwrights who pander to these commercial conditions take their proper place, not as dramatic architects, but theatric jerry-builders.

However, when all is said and done, it is ourselves, the audiences, who are chiefly to blame. These conditions, to some extent, must always exist, since the majority of playgoers will continue to be like sheep. But they will be alle-

viated as the number of independent playgoers increases, resulting in the demand for plays that no longer repeat stale types, and in the encouragement of actors and actresses, who would set the dignity of their art and their own personal liberty as artists above considerations of mere lucre.

Now that we have examined sundry qualities which distinguish pseudo-realism, it remains to note a flaw inherent in what is recognized as the true type of realistic motive. It is, in a word, a tendency to limit its own horizon; and it does so in two ways. In the first place, occupied with character and conduct as they are objectively exhibited, it is disposed to recognize no other test of either than a physiological one; and to ignore the influence of soul or spirit. Secondly, as a later development of this attitude, it makes the actual conflict of passion or emotion its sole concern; excluding all reference to moral considerations. The one, in fact, with ethical or moral intent curtails the springs of ethical and moral action; the other is entirely unethical, non-moral. The latter, which represents the defect of the realistic motive in its latest and extreme form, may be considered first.

It has become a practice of some authors — and they are among the most skilful of modern playwrights — to treat the stage as a cockpit of the passions. Into the contracted arena of some situation, from which there is no possible escape, they turn loose two characters, as if they were a brace of game-birds. Then, as the inevitable conflict ensues, they note and gloat over each attack and parry, and follow eagerly each throe and spasm of anguish, until one or both of the combatants succumbs. The conflict is waged for no principle, it is no part of the universal struggle; it is an isolated fight put up and studied and enjoyed for its own sake; the author goading on the game-birds, and the audience invited to sit around the cockpit and feast on horror.

As an example of this kind of realistic motive, I do not think it is unfair to mention Anthony P. Wharton's very clever play, *Irene Wycherley* produced last season in London and New York. It will be remembered that the conflict is one between a husband and wife. The former is not only degraded by drink but horribly disfigured through a gun-explosion; a foul-mouthed, vile-minded brute, on the verge of paralysis.

The wife in mind and body is a splendid creature to whom the contact of the husband is a pollution. But being a Roman Catholic, she is debarred from divorce; and her father-in-law, to save the appearances of the family, dissuades her from separation. So the cockpit is constructed. There is no escape from it except through the death of the husband. This, of course, we foresee, but are compelled to wait for until the end of the play. Meanwhile all that is left to us is to watch the woman's phases of agony and shame, as insult and outrage are heaped upon her by the loathsome wretch, whom the author has pitted against her to satisfy our lust for horrors. There is no pretence, as far as I can see, of challenging the religious contention that even such a marriage must be indissoluble, or of impugning such a method of saving the appearances of the family. No moral or economic issue is raised; nor any problem as to what the end will be. The only problem is as to what particular phases of degradation will be experienced before the end is reached. It is, if I have judged the play fairly, the exploitation of a conflict merely for the sake of the shocks and thrills that it can be made to yield.

That the horrors of this particular play were gross in character is only incidental. Often they are all the more poignant because of their refinement, as when two lovers, inexorably separated, torment each other by analyzing the exquisite emotions they might have experienced, if only destiny in the shape of the cockpit's wall had not shut them out from the liberty of love and loving. Here the author uses no rude stick to goad them on; instead a glittering scalpel with which he delicately cuts down through the warm flesh and lays bare each nerve that we may see it quiver under the excess of torture. Meanwhile the only anæsthesia that he permits the lovers is their own absorbing love that dulls the pain with ecstasy. Once more the problem is solely the manner and the amount of suffering involved in a purposeless conflict.

As to that other defect of a great number of modern Realistic dramas — it shows itself in a tendency to limit the springs of human action. While the problem involved is based on ethical or economic principles, its solution is attempted by reference only to the physiological characteristics of human nature. No acknowledgment is permitted of soul or spirit. Because the

physiologist cannot put his finger on the seat of this consciousness, or establish its organic relation to the physical machinery of the body, he ignores its existence. The effects of heredity and environment he believes he can explain; the existence also and action of will, as a product of some cellular arrangement of the brain; but that indefinable, elusive consciousness that humanity possesses of something other than what is attributable to purely physical causes, because he cannot "place it," he refuses to take into account.

As a natural philosopher of the strictly objective kind, limiting his observations to what is demonstrable upon the dissecting table or attributable to the discoveries of the scalpel, he is consistent. But he is running counter to the instinct of humanity, which in all ages has felt the need of believing in the possession of some sense that is other than physical, and that it vaguely calls spiritual. Nor may the time be far distant when, through research into psychical and telepathic phenomena, it will discover even some reasonably scientific basis for its belief. Meanwhile the belief endures, and men and women, not all perhaps, but most, at least at

some period of their lives, acknowledge the soul or spirit as a source of human conduct. Consequently, when they find this continually ignored in the realistic drama, they resent the fact. They find the problems interesting, but the solution suggested uninspiring. It is for this reason, one may suspect, that Ibsen, for example, is not popular. People resent not only that he compels them to think, but that his thought seems limited in range. He would tether them by a string to a post, fastened in the ground, and bid them flutter round and round it, whereas there is that in them which makes them yearn for further flight. They do not object to his arguing around the center of a circle, but chafe at the contractedness of the circumference.

That this criticism of Ibsen is unjust, the result of a too unimaginative study of his work as a whole is beside the point. It is an impression very widely held, and strengthened by acquaintance with the work of a host of other dramatists who have followed him. And when people speak of the lack of optimism exhibited in these plays, it is probably this which they have in mind. They do not demand that a play shall necessarily end happily; but they do believe

that the continual tendency to represent men and women as the slaves of their physiological selves, incapable of rising above their natures through the inspiration of soul, is a phase of pessimism. They recognize the good that realism has done in restoring the drama to its relations with actual life, but deplore the limiting of that relationship to the sole facts of the body, in defiance of what they believe to be the claims of spirit. For, in the long run, they are convinced that man cannot live by bread alone.

That other form of realism, the impressionistic motive, is represented, as we have said, only to a small extent in drama. It is a late phase and in some respects is the product of a reaction from what we have just been discussing. As in painting, its aim is to suggest the impression produced upon the mind by an observation of certain facts; the facts themselves being treated as of subordinate importance. In Maeterlinck's *Death of Tintagil*, for example, the motive is to represent through dramatic action the tragic inevitableness of death. We watch a woman's anxious tenderness for a child; see the child lured away from her, and the woman's anguish as her pursuit is barred by a door that has

closed upon the child. The treatment of the piece is symbolic; but of this we will speak presently, noting now its impressionistic character.

Just as impressionism in painting has been defined as "realism, represented in its milieu," that is to say, as the representation of the real appearance of an object by rendering the effects of lighted atmosphere that surround it, so Maeterlinck has invested with atmosphere the persons of his drama. It is, of course, the spiritual atmosphere in which they for the time being move and have their being. But the analogy with painting is close; for the painter by rendering the lighted atmosphere in his picture is able to make the scene express the mood of feeling with which it has inspired himself or he wishes to inspire us. The effects of lighted atmosphere are, indeed, the expression on the face of nature. Similarly, the poet-dramatist sheds around his personages an atmosphere of suggestion that expresses their emotions and stirs our own. It is not by the direct import of their words and acts that we are moved, but indirectly through some subtle suggestion that pervades the scene. While in a realistic drama,

such as *Hedda Gabler*, our mind actively follows each step in the progress of the action, in the case of the *Death of Tintagil*, or of *Pelleas and Melisande*, our mind is rather, as it were, induced into a trance, during which it becomes clairvoyant to psychic suggestion. This will probably sound far-fetched and perhaps a little foolish to any one unfamiliar with these dramas; but, if he will study them, I venture to believe he cannot fail to discover the quality that I have tried to describe in words. He will find it also in two remarkable plays by the Irish dramatist, J. M. Synge: *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy of the Western World.*

When we come to analyze the means by which this suggestion of the spiritual atmosphere is produced, we shall find firstly that it results from the dramatist's intention to view the action in relation to a conception vastly larger than itself; and secondly, that he fulfils his intention through the poetic use of words. Thus, it is the inconceivably vast conception of death in relation to life, that surrounds the little movements of the characters in *The Death of Tintagil* with an envelope as illimitable and impenetrable as the firmament of ether. And in this firma-

ment the mystery of their lot is but a speck of stellar dust; yet it has in it the germ of the million-fold mystery of the universe. To convey this impression to our spirit the dramatist not only draws upon a copious vocabulary, but has the gift of investing words with a rich imagery of analogous allusion; so that, while they point a direct thought, they at the same time surround it with an *aura* of impalpable suggestion. He, in fact, uses his words, not only as current coin, but also as symbols.

This being so, one distinguishes these dramas as symbolic in intent, which brings us to a consideration of the Symbolic Motive. It is inspired by the dramatist's desire to view the action in relation to a larger significance than that immediately arising from the actual incidents of the plot. It represents, in fact, a reaction from the purely objective motive of Realism, and in these modern times it expresses itself by means of the principles of indirect suggestion involved in Impressionism. Its prototype is to be found not, as we have seen, in Renaissance allegory; but in Oriental art, in Greek art, and in Shakespeare.

Oriental art is saturated with symbolism; and

it is the knowledge of that art, acquired during the past forty years, which has helped to draw our own artists toward this motive. To the symbolic character of the Greek drama we have already alluded; and, as an illustration of the occasional appearance of it in Shakespeare, we may mention the scene in *King Lear*, where the madness of the elements invests the madness of the old king with a wider significance than that aroused by the contemplation of one poor distraught brain. Madness is abroad in the universe, just as devilment is felt to be in the Witches' Scenes of *Macbeth*. It is again abroad in the Brocken scene of *Faust*.

It is because Ibsen avails himself of the resources of symbolism, that the common judgment of him is, as we said above, unjust. The main significance, for example, of *Peer Gynt* is symbolic. The scenes in which he plays his part, however baldly realistic they may be made to seem in the ordinary stage representation, are, as conceived by Ibsen, full of suggestion to the spiritual imagination. Again, in *The Master Builder*, the conception of the Master Builder himself and of Hilda are instinct with symbolism, while the constant allusions to the tall church

spire and the tower above the house lift the mental realization of the action far beyond the limits of the incidents actually enacted. So too in *The Lady from the Sea*, to mention only one more example, the suggested presence of the sea, with the idea of freedom that it involves, forms a background of larger spiritual intention behind the visible and audible movement of the action.

Maeterlinck's use of the symbolic motive we have already instanced, and in the same connection may recall Hauptmann's *Sunken Bell* and Maxim Gorky's *Nachtasyl*. But our object here is not to give a record of symbolists, but to note this revival of symbolism, carried further than before, as one of the signs of modern drama.

It remains to suggest the dramatic principle involved in its use. Symbolism is the creation of an abstract suggestion. It invests the action with an atmosphere that is pregnant with stimulation to the imagination. It is an extension of the reality of the concrete by the suggestion of the latter's relation to some abstract, universal conception. It is possible to entertain an abstract conception without any reference to the concrete; for example, an abstract conception of

Scenè from Corneille's "Andromeda."
(See page 53.)

Truth. On the other hand, we may embody this in a concrete representation of Truth; and such embodiment is what allegory is. As Maeterlinck says, "allegory is the work born of the symbol; but the work," he adds, "cannot have the principle of life." By this, presumably, he means that the concrete representation, so born, has no actual independent existence, apart from the abstract. On the other hand, it is when the symbol is born of the concrete, that it involves symbolism, as understood and used by modern writers. That is to say, it is only when the concrete has a living, independent existence, that it is capable of giving birth to the abstract, symbolical suggestion.

Translated into a principle of dramatic technique, as it has been by modern symbolists, this implies that the first essential to symbolic suggestion is a human action, a conflict, engaged in by actual persons; a fabric of concrete realism. This the dramatist, if the action of his "living human beings" inspires him to it, may enrich with symbolic decoration. The latter will have grown out of, because suggested by, the form and moldings of the concrete fabric. On the other hand, for the dramatist to start with the

symbolic intention and to invent it out of his own head, would be as futile as for an architect to begin with inventing decorations and then to try to make them stand up in place, without first having erected a building to support them. It is the lack of such a sub-structure of independent human action, vitally interesting in itself, that has proved fatal to some attempts at symbolic drama.

CHAPTER XII

THE AMERICAN OUTLOOK

IN the foregoing pages we have reviewed some of the salient considerations that affect the appreciation of the drama, regarded both as a form of art and as an expression of human life. It is natural, in conclusion, to inquire how far the life of our country has been expressed in the form of native drama. Have we yet any drama that can be called essentially American?

There have been dramas, it is true, and good ones, which have depicted certain phases of American history and certain social conditions incident to life in America. They naturally fastened hold of the interest of American audiences and in some cases have been enthusiastically received by foreign playgoers. The latter have found them racy with a flavor of unusualness. But would they admit that they exhibited any fundamental traits which could be distinguished as characteristically American?

This question in connection with pictures

was raised at the Paris Exposition of 1900. The Frenchmen had been told of the great strides which painting had made in America, as distinguished from the painting by Americans who resided in Paris, and they looked to find something that could be identified as characteristic of the New World. They found it, or rather suspected its presence, only in the pictures by Winslow Homer. For the rest, they noted that the technique, which was of admirably good average, was a reflex of the teachings of their own schools; and that the landscapes exhibited a certain local character, different from the natural conditions with which they were familiar, while now and then a figure picture represented some incident or phase of life that also bore an unfamiliar aspect. But, beneath these surface differences, was there anything that could be recognized as perhaps fundamentally American? They suspected it only, as I have said, in Winslow Homer. He was represented on this occasion by a picture of a fox, struggling through deep snow, while a bird of prey hovers above him, and by a *Summer Night*, in which two fisherwomen are revolving in a dance by the edge of the ocean, over which

the sun is sinking in a crimson haze; also by *The Look Out — All's Well* and an ocean piece with a bit of the wild rocks of the Maine coast and a tumult of gray water. It cannot be said that either of these represented any scene sufficiently local in character to be recognized as markedly characteristic. It was in fact not the locality of the subject, but the spirit which had animated the artist in his rendering of it, that awoke the interest of the keenly observant Frenchmen. Susceptible to impressions, they were conscious here of a largeness of outlook, and of freedom and vigor of conception and treatment, that seemed to them characteristic of what they had heard of the immensity of the New World, and of the strenuousness of life there and its freedom from Old World prejudices. These pictures, therefore, seemed to strike a new and impressive note, that the French critics eagerly welcomed as characteristically American. And, I repeat, they found it only in the work of Winslow Homer.

Now it seems to me that this is apposite to the inquiry, whether the drama in America has yet shown itself to be characteristically American. If it has, or when it does, the evi-

dence will not lie in certain local differences but in the exhibition of a spirit that is a part of the national consciousness. Moreover, it is only in this sense, that, in looking back upon the art of any country, we recognize its merit as an expression of the distinct characteristics of a nation or a school. The purely local differences, as our great artist and critic, John la Farge, has said, are rather an element of weakness; particularly, if the artist has placed upon them his main reliance. It is in the embodiment of the spirit which was the life-breath of the people of its day, that the art of any period can be reckoned characteristic in the highest sense.

This fact is apt to be overlooked by students both of painting and the drama; they urge that the painter and playwright should occupy himself with American themes; and rightly, for either artist will do well to gain his inspiration from what is most familiar and congenial alike to him and to his public. But, if this is all that they urge, they stop short of demanding the really vital thing. They urge the payment of "mint and cummin," but "neglect the weightier matter of the law."

So far, it appears to me unquestionable that

American dramatists have simply fished upon the edge of American life for little small fry of local characteristics. The deep wide ocean of its life they have neither compassed nor plumbed. *The Great Divide*, for example, one of the raciest and most serious of American plays, represented but a dip into the possibilities of its own theme. This was surely the psychological divide between the respective temperaments of a woman, a product of the old culture of the East, and of a man who represented the newer conditions of the Western frontier. In the play itself, however, the problem merely glimmered through the action, in which the subtlety of the psychological plot was overpowered by the emphasis laid on the purely local characteristics. And yet this drama may be hailed as the nearest approach to a drama characteristically American in the true sense.

Into what the latter implies we may gain a further insight by recalling that phrase which French critics apply to the Scandinavian and German drama. Among the different writers and their differences of motive and method they recognize a certain note in common, which they call the "Northern Spirit." It will be when

criticism, especially foreign criticism, which has the advantage of a long-distance perspective, can detect a corresponding American spirit in our drama, that the latter will be in the true sense characteristically American.

May one venture a forecast of the quality of that note in common? It will not have, like the "Northern Spirit," a quality of pessimism. On the contrary, one may believe that its distinction will be optimistic. Yet not in that tiresome sense of assuming that everything is for the best and, therefore, of refusing to take account of anything that jars with this assumption. The optimism will not reveal itself in assertions and reiterations of self-satisfaction or in an ostrich-like avoidance of the serious problems of life; it will not in fact be an article of faith; but the product of a habit of conviction. Its presence will be felt in the drama, as we feel the air upon the mountains, a tonic, laden with the liberty and vigor of vast spaciousness.

At present the American dramatist shows a tendency to be an opportunist; to take advantage of some theme uppermost in the public mind and to treat it from the point of view of the

man or woman in the street. He cannot or will not view it in its big significance, or bring to bear upon it the judgment of a high and wide outlook. Such is the weakness, if I mistake not, of plays like *The Lion and the Mouse* and *The Witching Hour*. Their theme is a big one, treated however in a petty way.

On the contrary, when the truly characteristic American drama arrives, it will be distinguished by largeness of outlook and treatment, by the equivalent of that spirit which opened up the West and has raised the material and political importance of the country to its present height. While its technique may be based on the Old World models, the handling of its theme will reflect the social ideals of the New. It will be essentially a drama of liberty; viewing the problems that it presents in relation to the national ideal of equal chances for all, and with an independence of judgment that has in it something of prophetic vision. At present it is only American in the local sense, of representing incidents drawn from American life, its attitude towards which is as cramped as the spirit of the national life is free.

In promoting the American spirit in our

drama the public will have to play its part. We began this book and may well finish it with a reference to audiences, since on them in the final analysis rests the responsibility for what the drama is and is not. As long as they are content to frivol with the drama merely as a form of amusement and to visit the theater in order to stifle the yawns of existence, regarding the people on the stage as a bunch of performing animals, so long will much of the drama be foolishness, verging on vulgarity. Again, as long as they hesitate to regard the drama as being a vital medium for the representation of the actualities of life, so long will their taste for the "pink-tea" variety be catered to. Moreover, as long as they demand that the actual problems of existence shall be reflected in the drama, but are careless as to whether the problem be a vital one or its solution be of large significance, so long will the dramatist be tempted to play merely upon the fringe of life. In short, it will only be when a considerable part of audiences, habitually viewing life in a spirit of mental liberty and independence, shall demand to have life so represented on the stage, that the characteristically American drama, instinct with the American spirit, will arrive.

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